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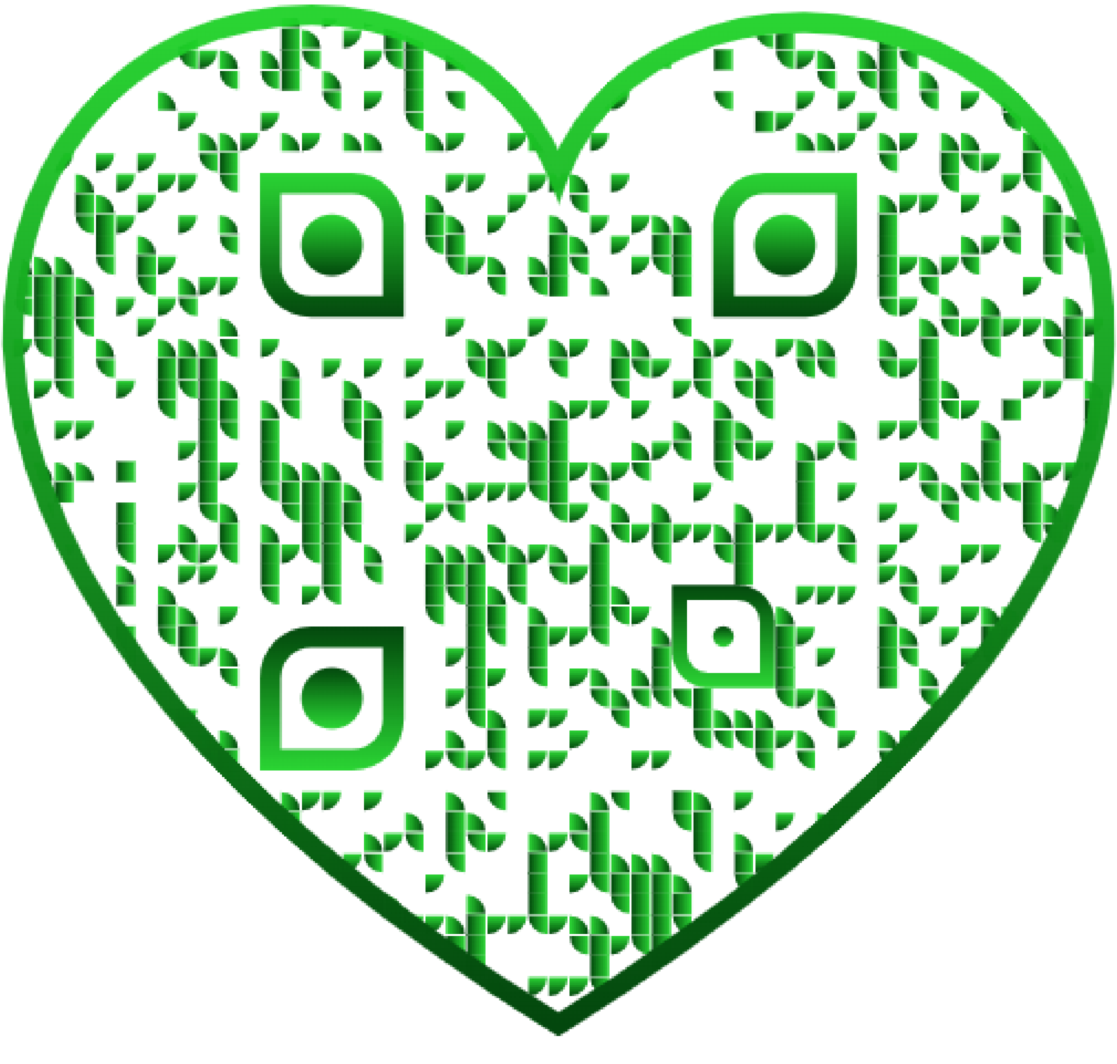

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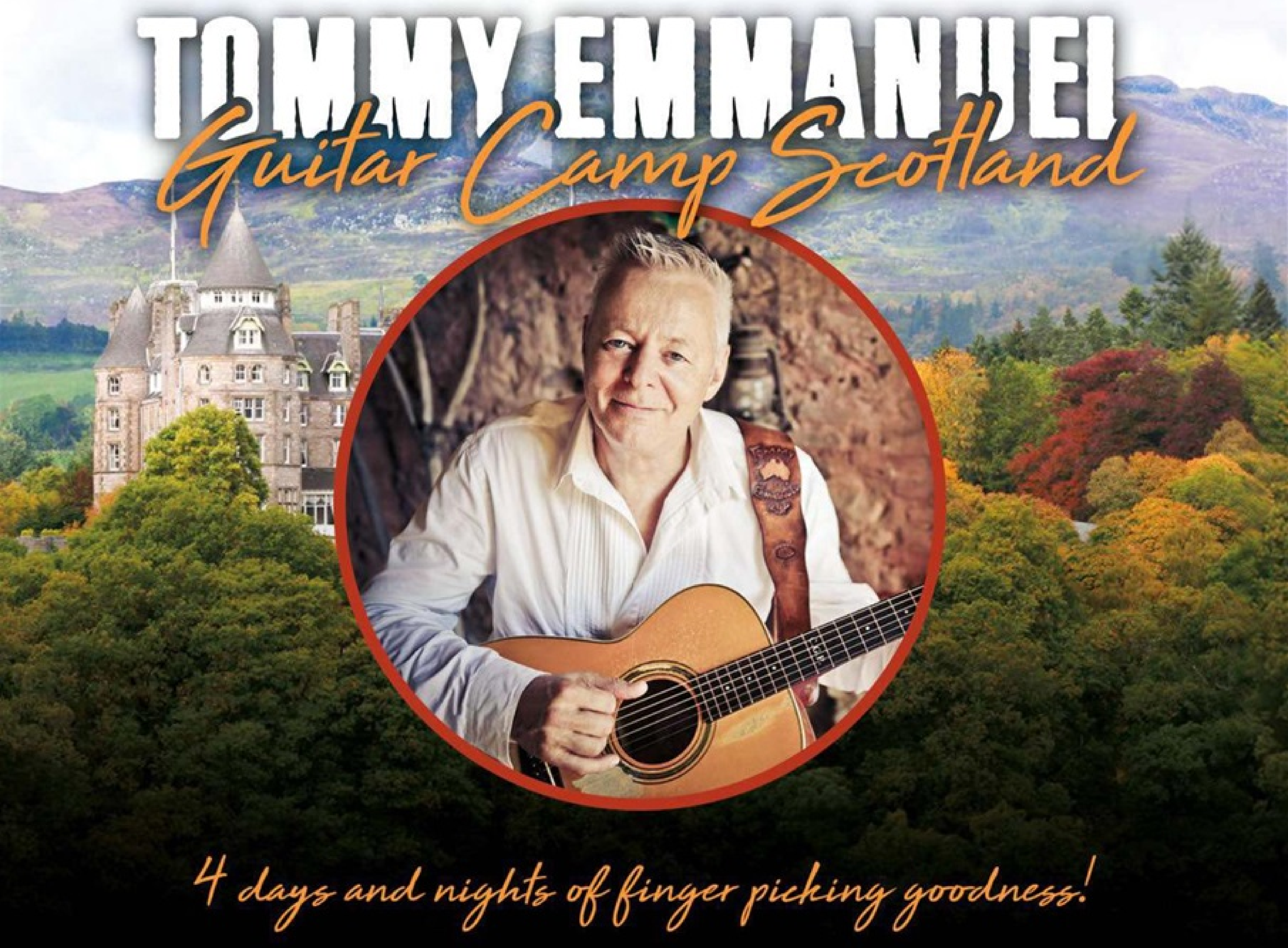

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THE ROOT NOTE

Back in 2008, I started writing gig reviews for my local newspaper, The Sheffield Star, with the aim of kickstarting a career in journalism. With only a byline and plus-one as payment, I reviewed every kind of show imaginable; from Motorhead to Michael Bolton and everything in between. At times, it could be tedious. Other times, it was incredible.

One gig that fell firmly into the latter category was The Levellers, a band I'd loved for ages. However, the night proved to be much more than engaging in circle pits to the Brighton folk-rockers. For that night there was a little-known acoustic artist on the bill called Frank Turner. So enthralled was I by Turner's charisma and heartfelt performance, I went out the very next day and bought his new record at the time, *Love Ire & Song*, and it became my favourite record for ages.

This month, I finally got to meet Turner to discuss his new release and found him to be an interesting, humble, hilarious, and, generally, down-to-earth cool chap. It's funny, though, almost a decade since that first gig, Turner has progressed from relative obscurity to become one of the most-loved singer-songwriters of the times; an army of devoted fans tattooing his lyrics all over themselves. And here I am, editor of a music magazine, getting paid – actual money – to write. Yup, it's a funny old world.

Enough rose-tinted reflection, though, eh? There's plenty more awesomeness to be had in our first issue of 2018! We chat with one of the world's best acoustic and slide guitar players, Martin Simpson. We hear from Kate Rusby; arguably the finest folk voice in existence. Dublin folk miscreants Lankum talk about their debut and CC Smugglers profess the importance of guerrilla gigs.

Gear-wise, we road-test a top-of-the-range Takamine, find out if a Breedlove that doesn't look like a Breedlove can still do the business, get our fingers around the new Florentine cutaway-equipped Sigma, see if an ultra-affordable Gretsch is indeed crackerjack and get our rhythm on with a nifty new device from Boss.

As ever, there's top tuition from the pros, history, hijinks, new music and never a dull moment to be found.

Enjoy the issue!

Dan Hobson
Editor

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ROBERT PLANT TO GET AMERICANA AWARD

The Americana Music Association UK has chosen iconic singer, songwriter and musician Robert Plant to receive its highest honour, the 2018 UK Americana Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition of his contribution to the genre.

AMA CEO Stevie Freeman said: "Over the course of a legendary career, from his early love of blues and rock'n'roll, through the 70s with rock pioneers Led Zeppelin, to a solo career that has never stood still, Robert Plant has introduced countless millions of music lovers to American roots music.

"In 2007 he released the iconic *Raising Sand* album with bluegrass star Alison Krauss, creating new fusions in the Americana world and garnering six Grammys along the way. His latest album, *Carry Fire*, continues to combine elements of American roots and blues with folk styles from the UK and beyond."

Also among the recipients at the third annual event, London four-piece The Wandering Hearts will receive the Bob Harris Emerging Artist Award.

New for 2018 is The Grass Roots Award, intended to honour people working in the industry (in a capacity other than as artists) who have made outstanding efforts to support Americana music. This year's winners will be Come Down & Meet The Folks, Alan Tyler & Big Steve.

Other winners will be announced at the awards on Thursday February 1, 2018, at Hackney Empire, with performances by some of the nominees.

Info: https://theamauk.org

CELTIC CONNECTIONS 25TH BASH

Celtic Connections festival celebrates its 25th anniversary this month.

From January 18 to February 4, 2018, Glasgow will host a whole programme of one-off musical collaborations alongside talks, workshops, film screenings, ceilidhs, art exhibitions, free events and late night sessions.

The informal theme of this year's festival is change: highlighting how much Scotland's music scene has changed over the last 25 festivals. Donald Shaw, artistic director, explains: "The influence and inspiration that the traditional music scene has had across the whole musical landscape in Scotland and worldwide has helped to make the journey of Celtic Connections all the more adventurous and exciting."

Highlights will include appearances from Kate Rusby, Levellers co-founders Mark Chadwick and Jeremy Cunningham, King Creosote, This Is The Kit, Frank Turner and a whole host of legendary names. (Pictured: Martin Simpson at the 2008 event).

Info and tickets: www.celticconnections.com

CAMBRIDGE CITY ROOTS

In further winter folk festival news, the lineup for the second City Roots 2018 – which sees some of the Cambridge Folk Festival's big hitters return to the city in February and March – has been announced. Early line-up confirmations include Sona Jobarteh, Muntu Valdo, Wildwood Kin, Ward Thomas, comic Rich Hall, broadcaster Tom Robinson, Chouk Bwa Libète, Sam Kelly & The Lost Boys and Wilko Johnson.

Tickets for shows can be purchased individually from www.cambridgelivetrust.co.uk

FAITH NEWS

UK-based guitarsmith Faith has announced new models for 2018.

A new version of its Hi-Gloss Venus acoustic guitar will be aimed at fingerstyle and percussive guitarists. The Hi-Gloss Venus Percussive has an advanced Fishman INK Body preamp, which combines an under-saddle piezo pickup with a body sensor, located under the bridge plate – ideal for picking up body taps and slaps. Controls include a three-band EQ, tuner, notch filter, brilliance, and body, which allows players to blend both pickups.

Otherwise, the Hi-Gloss Venus is spec'd as normal, with a solid Engelmann spruce top and solid rosewood back and sides, satin mahogany neck, plus Macassan figured ebony fingerboard, bridge and pins. **The Hi-Gloss Venus Percussive is available now for £1,049.**

Faith has also announced another addition to its burgeoning range of acoustics, the affordable Nexus Series, which combines elements of all its existing models.

Two models are initially available: the OM cutaway/auditorium Venus, and the larger baby-jumbo Neptune, both of which feature solid mahogany tops, backs and sides.

The models are available in Cognac or Copper-Black stains with high-gloss lacquer finishes, and both boast mahogany necks, Macassan figured ebony fingerboards, bridges and pins.

Also onboard are Fishman electronics – the Isys+ on the Venus and Sonitone soundhole system on the Neptune; both include Fishman Sonicore under-saddle pickups.

The Faith Nexus Series Neptune (£619) and Venus (£649) are available now, while a left-handed Nexus Venus Copper Black model will be available in early 2018.

Info: www.faithguitars.com

VANCE JOY ANNOUNCES EUROPEAN TOUR 2018

Australian singer-songwriter Vance Joy has announced that he will be embarking on a headline European tour in March 2018.

Starting on March 6 in Leeds, the tour will see Joy play 13 dates all across Europe before concluding in Manchester on March 25. Included in the run of dates is a show at London's Brixton Academy on March 7. This show was originally scheduled to take place at London's Kentish Town Forum but was upgraded to the near 5,000 capacity venue due to unprecedented demand.

Last month, Joy released brand new track 'Like Gold', which is the second glimpse he has given fans of his forthcoming album.

Joy will be talking about his new album in the next issue of *Acoustic*.

Info: www.vancejoy.com

CITES TREATY - INDUSTRY LEADERS SPEAK

"We'd heard rumblings about it in October and November 2016, but there wasn't a lot of warning. The really big, organised suppliers had made some preparations, but they were in the minority." So says Lee Anderton of Anderton Music with regards to January 2017's amendment to the CITES treaty – restricting the import and export of all rosewood, bubinga and kosso, often used in fingerboards – which has caused seismic waves to be felt in the guitar-building industry.

Our sister magazine Guitarist recently published a thought-provoking digest of 2017's latest updates to the act (over at Music Radar website), and gives a range of advice to guitar owners concerned about what it may mean for travelling with affected instruments – albeit pointing out that individual owners will be largely unaffected. The bulk of the administrative headaches, though, as writer Mick Taylor explains, are for those working in the industry.

Collings UK importer Doug Chandler said: "I've been in this business a long time and there's not much evidence to suggest that serious guitar players and enthusiasts will accept alternative materials any time soon!" But, he adds, "it's important to say that we are in favour of any moves to preserve threatened species".

Bob Taylor inspects sustainably-sourced ebony at Cameroon's Crelicam factory

Some manufacturers are thinking long term, amid the likelihood that restrictions will only tighten in the future. As *Acoustic* reported earlier in the year, manufacturers such as Taylor are among those who have begun work with foreign suppliers who focus on the sustainable sourcing of wood, socially responsible forestry and the improvement of workers' lives.

Of his own prognosis, Bob Taylor told us: "Even if we change woods, it's still the guitar maker's job to make a good guitar with that. But the player cannot ask for materials that don't exist or that cause people harm, so I hope they respond to our offerings. In the same way that time heals wounds, it also heals the shock of change."

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The competition is open to UK entrants only. Under 18s must obtain parental consent to enter this competition and be able to demonstrate this to *Acoustic*'s reasonable satisfaction. Answers must be received by 02/02/2018. A winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received and will be sent the prize free of charge. Each winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date and will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which the prize should be sent. For full T&Cs, visit http://bit.ly/2eBRjfx.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

WORK NOT PLAY IS OUR CAMPAIGN TO END THE PRACTICE OF ASKING MUSICIANS TO WORK FOR LITTLE OR NO FEE – BE IT SO LITTLE IT BARELY COVERS YOUR COSTS, OR NO MONEY WHATSOEVER

It's a fact of being a musician that people will ask you to work for free all the time. We've heard all the reasons why; it's for charity! It's good exposure! It's a trial run! It's my brother's sister's best friend's auntie's birthday! As a trade union, we're not going to stop you playing for free if it is truly worth it – SXSW, your parents' 60th wedding anniversary, Glastonbury... But your friend's work do? Then you can and probably should ask for a fee that you think is fair.

We get that sometimes it can be difficult to explain the issue and what working for free really means. Especially to people who aren't musicians or self-employed workers, and especially when you are just starting out or part-time. We also understand that identifying, understanding and communicating the value of your work can be tricky. We know from plenty of experience that negotiating can be tough. That is where we come in – to support you through the process.

There is no one solution to a problem like this. But there are plenty of ways to counter and challenge the expectation of unpaid work.

WORK NOT PLAY

The MU launched Work Not Play to raise awareness of the issue, and empower our members to say no to offers of unpaid work and negotiate a fair fee.

Have you been asked to work for free recently? Tell us about it. Email the details to worknotplay@theMU.org or tweet using the hashtag #WorkNotPlayMU. We can look into it anonymously, find out why there's no money for musicians, and see if we can get a better deal. If they do not move to a more musician-friendly position, we can name them and shame them for not playing fair.

If you want to go it alone, asking for a fee works surprisingly often. And if you need support at any point, get in touch with your MU Regional Office.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

One way to start a discussion about fair pay is to use the MU's recommended minimum rates. These are the minimum we think you should be paid for your work – performing live, teaching, in theatre, sessions or as a freelance orchestral player. You can find them via theMU.org.

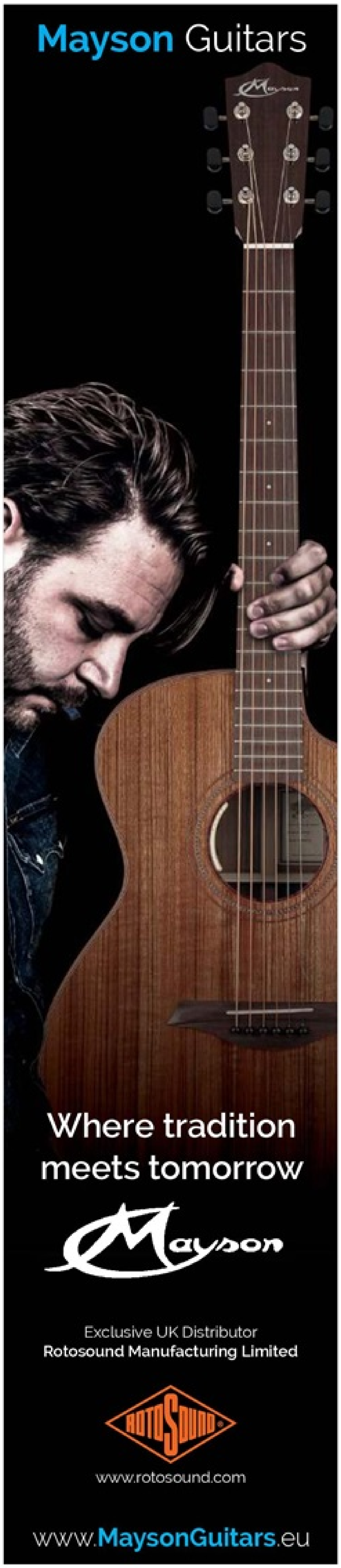
Think of MU rates as a guide to your value, an aid to your negotiations, and a basic calculation of how much you need to cover your costs as a musician. Like a living wage that includes things most people don't pay for, such as instruments, equipment and their insurance, or things most people don't have to work out for themselves, such as national insurance.

Another way to counter this unfair expectation is to be able to communicate your value effectively. One way you can do that is through PR. Building a good reputation, illustrating your professionalism, and developing a strong relationship with your fanbase will stand you in good stead for everything from getting press to getting paid.

In person, communicating your value can take assertiveness – the ability to state your views directly, honestly and with confidence. For some this skill comes naturally. For others, it's a real struggle and can be perceived as confrontation, when the goal is clear and effective communication. This is an important skill in negotiating, and something we will be exploring in more detail in a future column.

The best way to get a fair deal is to join a trade union. Trade union members are paid more, on average, than non-union members. In the MU's case, union membership gives you access to advice on fair pay, negotiating a fee, contracts and other important issues you face as a musician. Plus when you're a member of the MU, over 30,000 musicians have got your back.

Contact your MU Regional Office for advice on fair pay, what to do if you are asked to work for little or no fee, or advice on any other aspect of your career via **theMU.org/contact.** ■



JACK RUTTER

Once Seth Lakeman and Jackie Oates' go-to man, Jack Rutter is striking out alone. But as Glenn Kimpton found out, the young Yorkshireman has one or two beautiful guitars to ease the transition

Having not long finished his debut solo album *Hills*, Jack Rutter is just about at the stage where he can feel proud of it. "I've read *Acoustic* magazine for years," he begins, with a smile. "When I was about 16, I remember this one interview with Chris Wood, where they asked him how he felt about his new album [*Handmade Life*], and he said that he wasn't sure which phase he was in with it by then and whether he would love it or hate it. I think I went through that 'Is it any good?' stage when I listened back to the first recordings, but now I'm thinking 'I'm happy with that, I did the best job that I could there.'"

Jack has every right to feel pleased with *Hills*, a very assured set of established songs with a rustic feel and, on at least half of them, a Yorkshire connection (where Jack grew up and lives). In fact, even before one spins the disc, the traditional feel is there on the front cover, which looks like an old folk record, with its deep green colour and a bucolic picture of a grinning Jack sat outside on a pretty leafy lane with his instruments. "That was certainly what I was going for," he nods. "My favourite music to listen to and play is generally quite trad folk stuff. The music I listen to on the drive home after a gig when I need a friend in the van is Nic Jones, June Tabor, Paul Brady or Martin Carthy and the Watersons, stuff like that. And it struck me last year that I wasn't doing as much of that kind of thing as I would have liked, so I decided that I would make a solo album and make it how I wanted, which was a very trad folk album, like the sort of thing I listen to all of the time. And I can also see where the front cover photo was taken from my window, which is a nice touch; it's a very pleasant part of the world to be in."

And the traditional feel also extends to the sound, which was recorded in a very straight forward manner, taken live in the studio, with no overdubs. "I thought it would be quite a good idea, because I would have the songs right there and I could get the best take in a live and quite raw setting," Jack explains. "But also, I was talking with Ben Nichols [double bassist in Seth Lakeman's band], who is just a guru of all music ever, and he told me that *Penguin Eggs* was at first recorded with just voice and guitar in a room, and there is room for mistakes in that, which got me wondering whether I should do it all live with just mics. So I talked to Joe Rusby [Hills producer] about the idea and he just said 'yes, let's do it'."

It's a brave move to record a solo album naked, especially a first effort, but Jack is an established musician with good experience, so he could see the benefits. "Well yes, I think at some points it was harder to record it this way," he considers. "But overall it has worked better and come out better at the other end. It's a bit like, instead of layering guitars and everything else on, what you get is what you would hear if you were in the room at that precise moment, which is what I was trying to go for. What I also like in a recording is being able to see in my mind where the sound is coming from; I like the photos in the sleeve where they show you the studio or the space where the songs were created, so I wanted those in the album notes as well."

It must be quite refreshing for Jack to be able to make such decisions himself, having up to now mainly been involved in band projects, most notably Seth Lakeman's touring band, as well as Jackie Oates and the Moore Moss Rutter trio; this must all feel very different. "Well, I realise I'm in an extremely lucky place, being 25 and part of so many different types of bands and seeing many ways of approaching gigs and recording," he answers, humbly. "But they are all very different outfits. With the Seth gigs, it's a folk-rock gig, so its very jump up and down, whereas with Moore Ross Rutter, it's more tunes based and introverted, rather than that explosion of sound; and its different again with the Jackie gigs. I'm enjoying the solo side a lot; I started out solo when I was about 14, then got into the trio stuff, so at the beginning of this year, when I did my first solo gig in a long time, it felt very

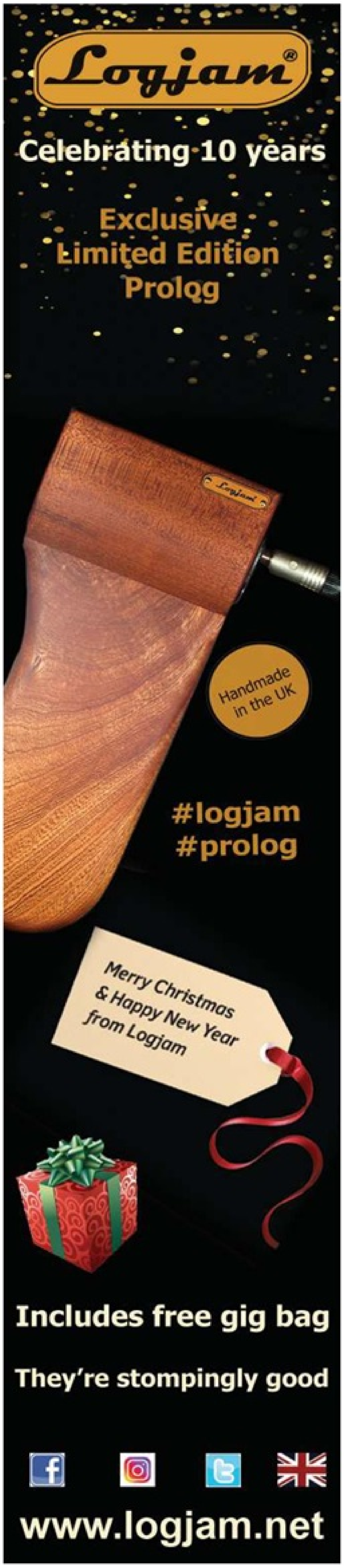
strange being just me with nobody to bounce off of or chat to on stage. But then I found that quite liberating because I can do whatever I want up there and change whatever I want and it's all on me. I'm not saying it's better, but it's nice having that different angle on things."

When it comes to being solo on stage and in the studio, Jack is lucky enough to have three beautiful instruments to help him create his choice sound, including a lovely Sitka spruce and Indian rosewood Atkin dreadnought. "Well, the Atkin is the one I end up playing the most at the moment," he says. "It's a HD28 Retrospective acoustic, and it's a powerhouse of an instrument, it's just huge! On the other hand, the smaller Martin I use is a CEO-7. I wanted to try a Martin guitar, so I got chatting to the UK distributor chap at one of the Seth gigs and was lucky enough to get hold of the CEO to use too. It's a lot smaller bodied than the Atkin and initially I was going to use it for some open E tuned stuff, because of the short scale, but it actually responds very well to the low tunings, like the Db tunings on the album, and even lower than that, which is wonderful."

Aside from the two acoustics and a concertina ["This isn't a concertina magazine, so I won't say too much about it"], Jack also picks up another strung powerhouse, but of a slightly different, and not entirely decided, nature. In his notes on the instrument, Roger Bucknall writes that the 10-string beaut is a cittern of sorts, while Jack has his own ideas. "The bouzouki is a Fylde custom fan fret, five-course, with an Engelmann spruce top and Macassar ebony back and sides," he explains, further filling us with envy. "I went back and forth to the workshop to see Roger quite a lot, which was really fun, and it really is a fantastic instrument." Bouzoukis and instruments in that family are known for having many varieties of tunings, much like the banjo, but Jack doesn't mess with it too much. "I tune it DGDAD, low to high across the five courses, so it's DADGAD based, like most of my guitar tunings," he tells us. "I also do a kind of partial capo thing across five of the strings sometimes, which can be a help and a hindrance. It's not so good when you knock it and it comes flying off; it makes you wish you hadn't bothered..." ■

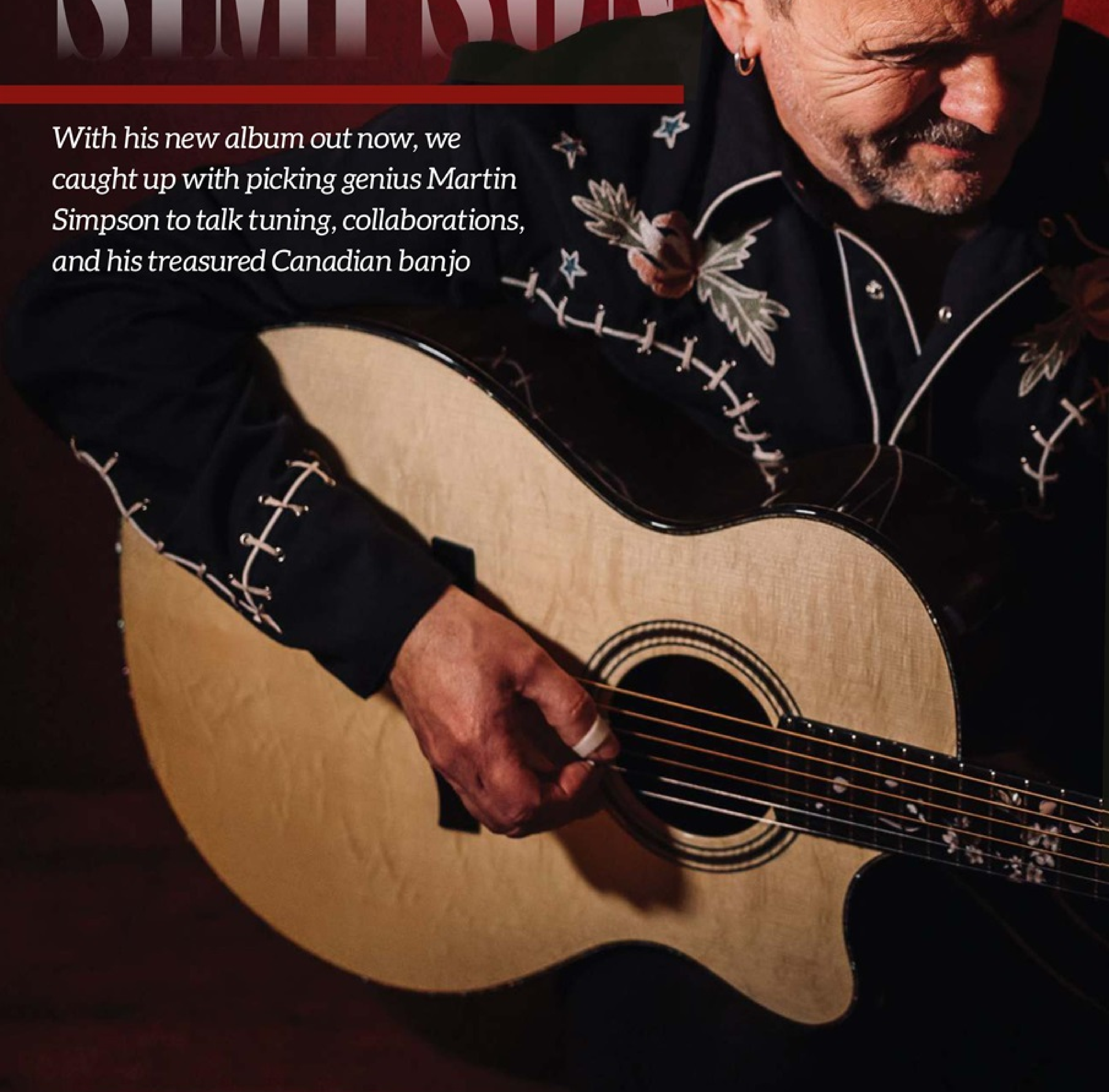
***Hills* is out now.**
Info: www.jackruttermusic.com

"Solo, I can change whatever I want"



MARTIN SIMPSON

With his new album out now, we caught up with picking genius Martin Simpson to talk tuning, collaborations, and his treasured Canadian banjo



Whereas Martin Simpson's 2013 album *Vagrant Stanza* wowed the listener with its bare-boned one-take recording, this year's *Trails and Tribulations* takes on a fuller sound, courtesy of John Smith, Andy Cutting, Ben Nicholls and Nancy Kerr, among others, alongside Simpson and his glistening arsenal of boutique instruments. "*Vagrant Stanzas* was just me and the idea was to record it live with a 'bang bang bang!' let's get these performances down approach," Simpson begins. "It was to show people that this is what I do when they see me on my own. But with *Trails and Tribulations*, it was a case of saying that this is really what I do, in a broader sense."

It is certainly a broader palette being used on the album, but credit must also go to Andy Bell, for engineering a subtle sound and creating a beautifully rich and light set of arrangements that never infringe on the song itself. "Take the track 'Bones and Feathers'," Simpson explains. "That one was sung and played live, the banjo and rhythm section, and then I overdubbed the slide Dobro part and added electric guitar and then strings and what have you. I knew that the foundation of the track was right to build on, but for me the loveliest thing on that one is my daughter Molly singing; that feels like magic to me."

The collaborations feel intrinsic to this album, particularly those with fiddle player Nancy Kerr and the excellent guitarist John Smith, who pops up all over the set. "It was great," Simpson smiles. "I got him to play and sing on 'Blues Run the Game' and 'Thomas Drew'. I played the guitar part and overdubbed the lap-steel on 'Thomas Drew'; I was perfectly capable of playing the electric guitar part too, but I knew that if I got John to do it, it'd bring something else to the song. Rather than me playing the way I play, I wanted John to play the way he plays. He did a great job. We've just played Cambridge, me, John, Amy Newhouse Smith and Ben Nicholls, and it was such a pleasure to do those songs with that unit. They're extraordinary musicians."

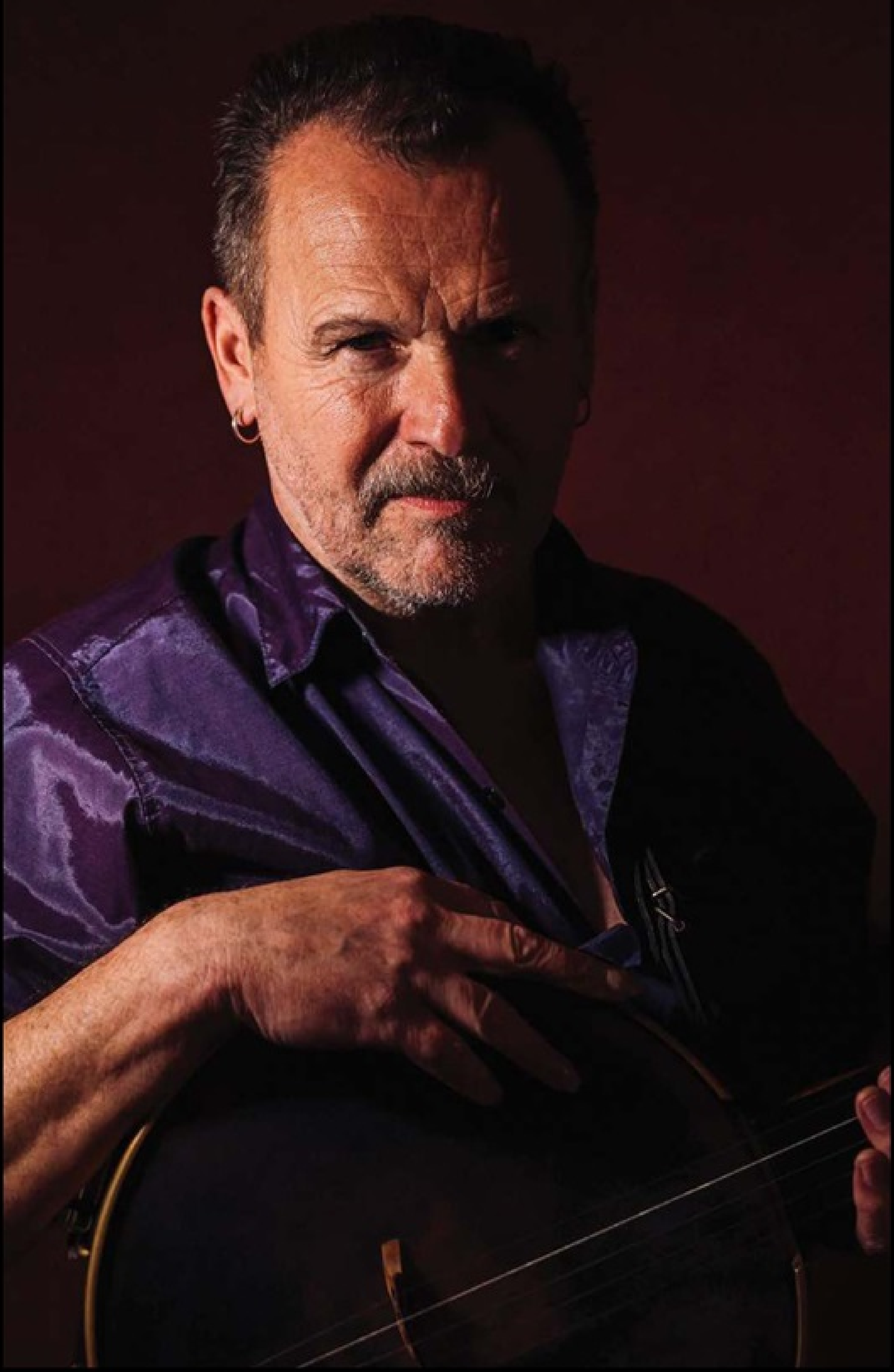
We move on to discuss the tunings Simpson used on the record, and the rubric of the question causes a reaction... "I don't dabble, I

immerse," he shouts, with a laugh. "There are some interesting and unusual things for me on this one that I haven't done in a while. I got hold of a really nice, very old Martin from what is undoubtedly their golden period, a 1931 000-18 12-fret in really original condition and it's extraordinary. But this one wanted to be tuned in open D major [DADF#AD], it didn't want to go down to C, so both 'Thomas Drew' and 'Jasper's Dancing Shoes' were written and recorded on that little guitar in open D major. Elsewhere, 'Blues Run the Game' is in G sus 4 over 4 [CGDGCD], and I used C sus 2 [CGCGCD] and C sus4 add 9 [CGCFCD], which are my go-to tunings, really. There's not a lot of re-tuning involved, using those, which is great, but it was really nice to write in that D tuning I hadn't used for many years."

After whetting our appetites with the mention of the vintage Martin guitar, it was time to get Simpson started on the other acoustic instruments he reached for when making *Trails and Tribulations*, and he didn't disappoint. "All the other basic guitar tracks are done on the PRS signature guitars,"

> **"I don't dabble – I immerse!"**

he tells us. "'St. James Hospital' is done on the one I use mainly on stage, which is a Honduran rosewood model with a very light finish on it and heavy strings, which is great for the slide. Most of the other tracks were recorded on a Brazilian rosewood guitar that arrived pretty much right before I started recording the main body of the album, so it's a very new one, but it's amazing and it records beautifully. If you look at the pictures on the sleeve, there's me playing a guitar with cherry blossom inlaid in the fingerboard, which is the Brazilian one." Simpson has been using the PRS guitars for some time now, and they seem to have replaced the Sobell as his standard choice; they must be pretty good... "Oh yes," he laughs. "They're wonderful, actually, and they're really consistent in that they feel almost identical when you swap from one to the other, because they are so well made. But then you get the differences in timber and the like, which means they have those subtle differences in terms of sound and performance. They're really great guitars."



On the album, aside from the beautiful old Martin guitar and those stellar PRS models, is a range of electric and other acoustic instruments, including some more PRS guitars, a super Fylde dobro with an electric pickup, a 1961 Gibson ES-125 with two old screaming P-90 pickups and a 1954 Stratocaster recreation by a builder called Alan Kennedy in Sheffield. He also uses a very special Ralph Bown slot-head Weissenborn instrument built out of Australian blackwood, a material very similar to koa. It really is quite a bunch, but one other that has really piqued our interest is the wonderfully pretty five-string banjo that always seems to be in a photo with Simpson, and he's quick to chat about it. "Oh, I could talk about that one for years," he laughs. "That's made by Jason and Pharis Romero [Romero Banjos], who are in Horsefly, British Columbia. Horsefly is in the interior and it's pretty wild, the sort of place where you might lose your

dog, because a bear will eat it! The Romeros are also staggering musicians, just incredibly good. When they sing together, it just blows your head off. But I first came across their banjos about eight or ten years ago and I hadn't even heard them, but the aesthetics of them I just thought were so incredibly beautiful and then I did hear them, and thought 'Oh my god'." Simpson was smitten enough to commission one of these instruments as a 60th birthday present to himself, and he had specific decorations in mind. "I asked Pharis, who does the inlays, to do British spring flowers into it; I wanted sloe blossoms in the neck and there's a little wood anemone on the heel cap. Luckily, Pharis has a degree in botany, so she was very good at that! They are amazing, absolutely spectacular things, those banjos." ■

***Trails and Tribulations* is out now.**
Info: www.martinsimpson.com

Over the past decade, Kate Rusby has become one of the most well-known voices in UK folk. Andy Hughes caught up with her to find out more about her new album

KATE RUSBY

Kate Rusby is the embodiment of the folk tradition that is so much a part of Yorkshire where she was born and lives with her husband and family. From there, Kate records in her own studio not far from her home and takes her band out on tour to bring her music to her enthusiastic and growing audience.

The ethereal images on her new album *Angles & Men*, showing Kate as an angelic figure, complete with an impressive set of wings, are utterly at odds with the entirely human and down-to-earth musician who chats with such enthusiasm about her life and music in her living room at home. Kate begins by explaining how her technique for songwriting has adapted since the birth of her two children. "I used to write all the time before I had children. Then it was easy, if an idea came to me, I would find an instrument and play for a bit and a song would come, or not, as it was, and then I would work on whatever came along over the next few days. When the children appeared, I did find I had to set time aside specifically to write songs. That means that now I have to plan when to be creative, which is a strange notion to get my head around. I do find now that I quite enjoy the time coming when I know I can let my brain wander, and see what comes up."

Along with the writing process, and its changes to adapt to family life, it's inevitable that the acoustic guitar playing style of a professional musician like Kate will adapt through time, as she describes. "When I first started playing the guitar, I started with a massive Guild model, it was red, and it was given to the family by Willy Russell the playwright – his wife was at university with my mum so they have been family friends for as long as I can remember. Willy always had a lot of guitars around the house and he loaned this Guild to my dad, so it was the first guitar I learned to play on. My dad taught me a few chords on this guitar and I used to sit and play songs in my bedroom. It was too big for me really, I could barely get my arm around it. But I knew lots of songs because my parents taught us loads of songs, I worked out the chords for those and then started working on my own chords for my own songs.

"Then I got a gorgeous Gibson acoustic that a friend of my dad brought back from America when he was touring over there. He saw this guitar and rang my dad and said it would be perfect for me because I was so small. So I got that and played with it for a while, but it went missing from a hotel lock-up in London. There were a few bands staying there, so it may have been picked up by mistake, but whoever got it never tried to get it back to me when they realised it wasn't theirs.

"I was very lucky because I already had my favourite guitar, made by a guy my dad

was at university with. My dad studied instrument repair and went on to lecture in brass instrument repairing at Leeds College Of Music. Studying alongside him was a guy called Pete Barton. He became a luthier and he drew a template from the Gibson I was playing and made me a guitar using the same specs, Brazilian rosewood back from a piece which had been traded around between luthiers, as happens. So even though my Gibson went missing, I already had my favourite guitar. And Pete made a duplicate, so I had two of them."

The songs on Kate's latest album, released in time for the Christmas buyers, contains her usual mix of traditional songs and her own compositions, but they are all full of the particular musical atmosphere that she manages to create. Anyone who has recorded in a studio knows that the sterile atmosphere can be less than conducive to intimate emotions being conveyed to the listener. Kate fully appreciates the joy of owning her own studio where she is able to take time to perfect the songs and use its ambience to create the presence that defines her appeal.

"We are lucky to have our own studio," Kate agrees. "One of the first things we did with the money from touring was to form a record label. My dad is in charge of that and we started buying studio gear and we bought an old farmhouse not too far away, maybe 15 minutes from home in the car. It's far enough to be 'work', which means I can leave it behind and have a separate home life without my career taking over everything, but it's close enough to nip over with a good idea.

"My dad and my uncle built the studio in the barn. Dad was an electrician and my uncle was a joiner, so they could do the work themselves. The studio has a huge window that looks down the valley, so it's nowhere near as sterile as some places. It was built when we were recording the *Sleepless* album, my dad and uncle came in early and worked through until about 4pm then we'd come in and record, working around the stuff they were working on, and we'd stay until the early hours. So I always associate that album it with the creation of our wonderful recording world."

Although folk musicians tend to follow the patterns and structures of their songs from their albums out onto the stage during tours, there is still room for some changes, which occur organically in Kate's experience. "It's an interesting point. Sometimes when you work in the studio you may be constrained by time, the time you have the musicians available for instance. But when you play the songs on the road, little bits change and evolve in the way they work, so you can stretch them out, or just change them.

"This last release was our fifteenth album, so can always go back and dip in and refresh versions of older songs. Because the band changed about five years ago, that brings a new dynamic, and doing an old song is like seeing an old friend and catching up, and different musicians have their own ideas. They are all creative musicians, and we love hearing their input, and their ideas for making things sound better. We don't work to written scores, which is just as well for me, I'm bad at reading!"

"Doing an old song is like seeing an old friend and catching up"

Another aspect of the recording process where Kate takes particular care is working out her vocals. "I do like to record a number of takes of my vocals for a song, I like to make sure I have explored all my different ideas for vocal inflections and phrasing, and then I listen back, and pick out the version that I feel works the best. I always used to do the guitar parts in one or two takes, but with the vocals, I do try more ways to get the feel that I am looking for."

When asked for tips, Rusby offers them with the same enthusiasm she brings to her shows. "In terms of playing, you must listen to as many people as you can, and really study how they sound, and get those sounds. Is it tuning, or technical playing? You may not even want to duplicate what you are hearing, but it will feed into your own technique and you will learn something you can bring to your own playing.

"In terms of writing, I've always loved the storytelling of folk music, and it was always natural for me to write a song that tells a story. When learning to play, and first write songs, I'd take a song and change bits so that it suited my way of playing and singing better. Traditional songs often change the names of locations and people to make them local to the areas where they are being performed, so by all means, personalise what you write about. Make it your own." ■

***Angels & Men* is out now.**
Info: www.katerusby.com

LANKUM

Dublin four-piece Lankum are breathing new life into traditional music. Dan Hobson caught up with brothers Ian and Daragh Lynch to hear more

The harsh beauty of Lankum repulses and attracts in an addictive paradox. At times, uncomfortable to listen to, at other times, humorous and uplifting, the darkness and light in their music swirl together in a devilishly macabre dance. But, then, for a band named after a child-murdering villain in an Irish ballad, perhaps it's to be expected.

Punk in all but the music, Lankum address uncomfortable realities with distinctive four-part vocal harmonies and arrangements of uilleann pipes, concertina, accordion, fiddle and guitar. Their repertoire spans humorous Dublin music-hall ditties, classic ballads from the traveller tradition, Irish-American, and American traditional dance tunes, as well as their own original material.

Originally an experimental-psychedelic-folk-punk-duo featuring brothers Ian and Daragh Lynch in the early 2000s under the name Lynched, the pair became increasingly fascinated with the Irish tradition and progressed into a four-piece after a meeting-of-minds at a pub session in their home city. The band – comprising Ian (uilleann pipes, tin whistle, concertina, and vocals), Daragh (guitar and vocals), Cormac MacDiarmada (fiddle and viola, vocals), and Radie Peat (concertina, accordion, harmonium, and vocals) – recently signed with Rough Trade, a label who have been delving into traditional music of late. The band have just released their debut album under the name Lankum, *Between the Earth and Sky*, which has been going down a storm. *Acoustic* caught up with Ian to talk about the new record, traditional music, and more...

The new album is a real experience, a great listen. Are you happy with it?

Oh, we're all delighted. It took one week to record and then we spent six months mixing – so a lot of blood, sweat, tears, fights, arguments and all the rest of it. We were all happy with the way it sounded going out, though.

Your gig in Bristol recently went down a treat! What's the balance of originals and interpretations at the shows?

Ah, thanks. Yeah, Colston Hall was a good gig! I'd say about a third is our own material. My brother and I started with all original songs,

but over the years we became more and more interested in the tradition. There are more original songs making their way into the set again, though.

How did the band start?
Daragh and I started making music in about 2002. We were called Lynched and we were writing protest music under the umbrella of folk punk. We released one album and toured extensively in Europe, the US, Mexico, and Ireland. We never had any big ambitions, just playing on the DIY scene in squats, social centres, things like that. But over the years our interest in traditional music started growing. Daragh started playing 'DADGAD' and other traditional tunings. I took up uilleann pipes. We started to go to traditional music sessions at pubs in Dublin and that's where we met Cormac and Radie. We just clicked with them, you know? We wanted to record another album so asked them both to help us on a couple of songs and it worked so well that they joined the band.

Tell me about your journey from hardcore punk to traditional folk...
The connection between punk and folk was always obvious to me. After growing up on anarcho-punk music like Subhumans, Crass, and Rudimentary Peni, when I first started to get into folk music it was songs by Christy Moore, The Dubliners, Andy Irvine, Planxty, The Pogues: socially-conscious songs, anti-war songs, anti-police-brutality songs, songs for workers' rights. The first connection I made was like, "These are singing about the same kinda things as bands I'm listening to, except you can hear the words when these guys are doing it". It makes more sense, it's more accessible. When I started going to sessions around Dublin, there was a definite communal atmosphere. It wasn't like going to a gig with a big band on stage, security guards and people paying big money. It's not an industry – it's people sitting in a pub playing music for the love of it. And that was exactly like the DIY scene I was coming from. There were all these parallels between the DIY punk scene and the traditional music scene in Dublin at the time. I started exploring the Irish Traditional Music Archives and the National Folklore Collection too, both places I ended up working in.

> **"Give me Neil Young over Steve Vai any day"**

Certainly important to keep tradition alive...
Definitely. The traditional music scene in Dublin is going from strength-to-strength at the moment. There are lots of younger people getting into it. There are so many sessions in the city, I love going to those and learning songs off older singers. There are a number of good bands going off in Dublin too: Skipper's Alley, Landless, Ye Vagabonds. Bands who are a bit younger than us but just as passionate about the tradition. We're definitely seeing something of a resurgence at the moment.

How do you decide which songs to interpret?
We're all off doing our own things – be it singing in sessions, with other projects, or just researching songs – so we all have a constant repertoire of songs that we're thinking about or that we're singing on our own. Everyone will suggest songs, and if it's something we all agree on, we'll then sit down and work on an arrangement.

How does it work when you're writing original tunes?
It depends on the song really. Two songs on the album, 'Déanta in Éireann' and 'Bad Luck to the Rolling Water', I wrote myself and we made arrangements in the studio, which worked really well. 'The Granite Gaze' was a much more collaborative effort, though, everyone working together. That was the first time we'd written a song in that way and it

worked really well, which bodes well for the future.

What's the plan for 2018?
We'll be over in the UK quite a lot. There's also talk of Canada, a few gigs arranged in Europe... we're getting busier all the time. We played a WOMEX showcase in Poland at the weekend, so hopefully some shows that way.

Any player tips for readers?
Stick with what you're doing; don't be too concerned with any imaginary ideas you have about what people want to hear or see. Don't compromise your art.

Finally, any artist recommendations?
Ah, so many. At the moment Richard Dawson, from Newcastle, is really blowing me away. There's a really great singer from Ireland, Katie Kim, Landless, Skipper's Alley, Ye Vagabonds. Everybody should seek out the first three Planxty albums. Swan Arcade is a band which is often overlooked, likewise The Watersons... that's probably enough to be getting on with! ■

***Between the Earth and Sky* is out now.**
Info: www.lankumdublin.com

"Don't be concerned what you think people want to hear"

GEARBOX

Lankum's resident guitar aficionado Daragh Lynch fills us in on all things gear and why artists should never admit mistakes or apologise on stage...

What gear are you using live?
I have a Martin D-35E 50th anniversary model, which I use for standard tuning stuff. It was far too expensive, but I kept going back into Goodwin's on Capel Street, Dublin, to play it every week. Eventually, the owner said I had to stop as he wouldn't be able to sell it as new.

The other is a Taylor GS8. I use it mostly for DADGAD, because it's so bright and sparkly that the down-tuned strings warm it up slightly. I have a DeArmond pickup from the 60s that I put in the soundhole for gigs. The pickup was recommended by John 'Spud' Murphy who does live sound for us and also mixed the album. We're considering getting a second DeArmond to use in the Martin too, for a bigger, warmer sound. I hate how crappy inbuilt guitar pickups sound at gigs, so we try figure out how to get a sound that actually sounds like the guitar, that you can still push to a good, loud level.

I also use an Audio Technica Pro 45 mic to get the actual sound of the guitar. The mic is actually for hanging above choirs, orchestras and speakers, but works well when blended with the sound of the pickup.

Tell us about your own collection?
The only other two guitars I have are a Tanglewood TWCE-STO and a Gibson Les Paul Studio Faded. I bought the Tanglewood in my early 20s and played it on *Later with Jools Holland*. I still play it quite often, but the sound doesn't really compare up to the Martin and the Taylor. I used the Les Paul when I played in a shock-rock, cowboy metal cabaret outfit called Fuck You Written in Shit. I really miss playing a very loud electric guitar sometimes, but that's the way it goes when your folk band takes off!

Who are your guitar influences?
Probably Slash, Kurt Cobain, Rory Gallagher and Dennis Cahill, in chronological order. The first three are obvious for a young lad getting into punk and rock 'n' roll. Rory Gallagher blew my mind when I was 16; I could see his influence on Slash. Kurt Cobain was one of those players who, although not the most technically proficient, put heart and soul into it, better than a demonstration of pure technical skill – give me Neil Young over Steve Vai any day! I discovered Dennis Cahill when I started playing traditional music in Dublin. He could just play two really minimal chords for an entire piece but place them in just such a way that it perfectly lifts the tune and causes your heart to swell. Again, serving the actual music as opposed to showing off!

Any player tips?
Keep at it! Attending traditional sessions meant I was constantly playing, hearing new tunes and going home to figure them out; seeing other guitarists much better than me and trying to figure out what they do. Never put yourself down on stage. If it's a particularly bad mistake just make a joke about it and carry on. Act completely unfazed and having a good time then the audience will too. Songwriting wise, just keep hammering away until it sounds right. ■

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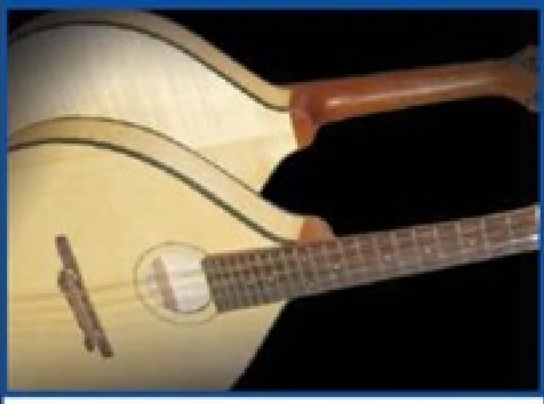

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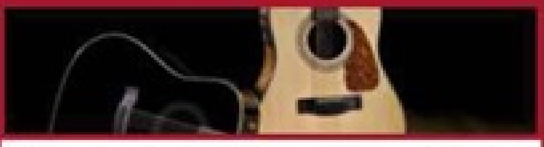
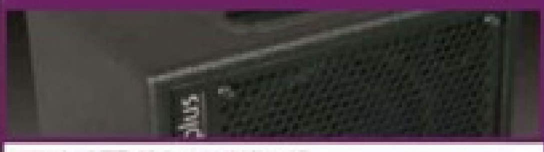
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
15858 - Stagg C432 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar

12 Strings



16506 - Fender CD-140SCE 12-String, Natural
16529 - Fender CD60SCE 12-String, Natural
16713 - Lakewood M32 Custom 12-String, Used
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 Acoustic, Nat

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk II
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
16714 - Baton Rouge UR11C Concert Ukulele
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
15931 - Baton Rouge UR21C Concert Ukulele
16198 - Baton Rouge UR3B Baritone Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE TenorUke LEFTY
15557 - Baton Rouge V4C Concert Ukulele
14650 - Baton Rouge V4TCE Electro Tenor Uke
15790 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Uke, Used
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Pihalea Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
15570 - Luna Malu Peace Soprano Ukulele
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele, Secondhand
7102 - Ohana CK10 Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13638 - Ohana CK22 Concert Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
16016 - Ohana CK70BA Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele, Lacewood
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
4706 - Ohana TK35G Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
9526 - Ohana TK50WG Tenor Ukulele
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
16017 - Ohana Ukuleles SK-30M Large Neck Soprano
16020 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-6 6-string Tenor
16019 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-8 8-string Tenor
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
10385 - Risa UKS365MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
10426 - Uluru III Tenor Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black
15621 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Tobacco Brown

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
3550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
16489 - Fender CT140SE Travel Guitar, Natural
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
16287 - JN Cigar Box Cask Hogshead Guitar
16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 Signature Edition
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Blk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
16722 - Yamaha JR1 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

CC SMUGGLERS

Offering something unique with their eclectic mix of original music, inspired by genres varying from swing and jazz to blues and Motown, Bedfordshire band CC Smugglers have quickly gained popularity. Emily Bielby chatted to frontman Richie Prynne to find out what makes them tick

CC Smugglers could be called Americana, blues or swing: but whatever you fancy labeling this six-piece band, their music is perhaps so varied that it's quite difficult to pinpoint what genre they'd fall into exactly. Then again, that's what has gained them success. Richie tells me how it all started as a rag-tag busker band. "I was doing a lot of performances on my own and slowly dragged in a couple of the lads and mates from school, one by one we just collected up a bigger band and made a name for ourselves by 'guerilla busking' and harvesting our brand that way."

CC Smugglers' big break happened when they busked outside every UK tour date of two-time Grammy award-winning US country band Old Crow Medicine Show. After catching their "hugely engaging live performance", they invited the guys in to play the remaining dates including Manchester Ritz and Shepherds Bush Empire. Proof that hard grafting when you're starting out as a musician really does pay off.

"We made a name for ourselves by 'guerilla busking'"

"I was listening to a lot of tapes on my Walkman," says Richie when I ask him about his musical background and influences.

"I used to like listening to John Peel in the middle of the night; he played an eclectic mix of music and showed me that mainstream radio is not the only thing you should be listening to. I used to go down to the market and spend my pocket money on country and rock'n'roll tapes from the 50s and 60s and that really influenced me."

He tells me which guitarists he and fellow guitarist Ryan Thomas idolised growing up. "Django Reinhardt and his band, obviously his guitar playing but I love the rhythm that those guys play, I love those gypsy swing rhythms. Also, Chet Atkins, he's a genius; because I am a writer, I prefer chord progressions and don't concentrate on being flashy and playing solos but they're fantastic lead players.

"Ryan, on the other hand, likes a lot of John Mayer and is keen on Muddy Waters. He likes a lot of electric blues, like on the *Hard Again* album and also likes jazzy chords and country licks," says Richie.

Richie was just 12-years-old when he first got hold of an acoustic, which ultimately led him down the path to becoming a fully established musician. He explains how he came to learn the guitar. "A friend of our family was an Irish folk singer and he used to come round and play Solitaire on our computer. My mum had asked me to ask him to teach me guitar but he was too interested in playing Solitaire that he couldn't be bothered to teach me. He eventually sat me down and showed me three chords, an A, an E and a D then told me to go write a song.

"So one hot summer evening I went outside to write a song and it was from then onwards that I never took any guitar lessons. All I did was write songs and every time I learnt a new chord, that was just another colour in my palette for songwriting. That's why I've grown up to be a songwriter and a chord based guitarist and that's why I became a writer rather than a lead guitarist," explains Richie.

Ryan's approach to learning guitar was somewhat different and happened very quickly. "Ryan didn't start playing guitar until he was about 19 and I heard him play once and I thought: 'Oh my God, you've had that guitar for a month and you're already fantastic.' He then went off to Australia travelling and by the time he'd come back, he'd only been playing a year and he was such a talented, well-established lead guitarist, it was fantastic! If he does

GEARBOX
The band talk us through their acoustic collection

SAM/RICHIE

LIVE

Martin D-15M and Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor II

RECORDING

Gibson ES-175 & Aria Pro II

RYAN

LIVE

Deering Vega Senator five-string resonator banjo, Martin DM acoustic, Fender Telecaster Highway One USA

RECORDING

Gibson Les Paul Junior Special & SJ-200

something, he becomes fantastic at it straight away," says Richie.

An orange dappled wood Washburn D11-AN, which is now discontinued, was Richie's first ever guitar. He'd had it from age 12 up until six months ago when the guys toured Europe and it got stolen. "I hadn't realised until I got back to the UK and unpacked that my Washburn had been stolen and I was beside myself, I actually shed a tear over it. It had been through my teenage years, every breakup I'd ever been through, any good moments, any bad moments, and any emotions I went through and experienced growing up, I vented and let them out on that guitar. So for it to get stolen was absolutely tragic. Admittedly it wasn't worth an awful lot but to me it was absolutely priceless. I'm hopeful that one day it will turn up: it's very unique, it's got a very distinctive burn mark on the under side which I will always remember and there's also a 3mm hole from an incident that happened when I was 18. We had a sword in our house – a decorative sword that someone might have picked up from a car boot – and I was at a party and someone threw it across the room and the tip of that sword pierced the side of that guitar. So with those two distinctive marks I will always be able to tell it's mine."

"I actually shed a tear when I realised my first Washburn had been stolen"

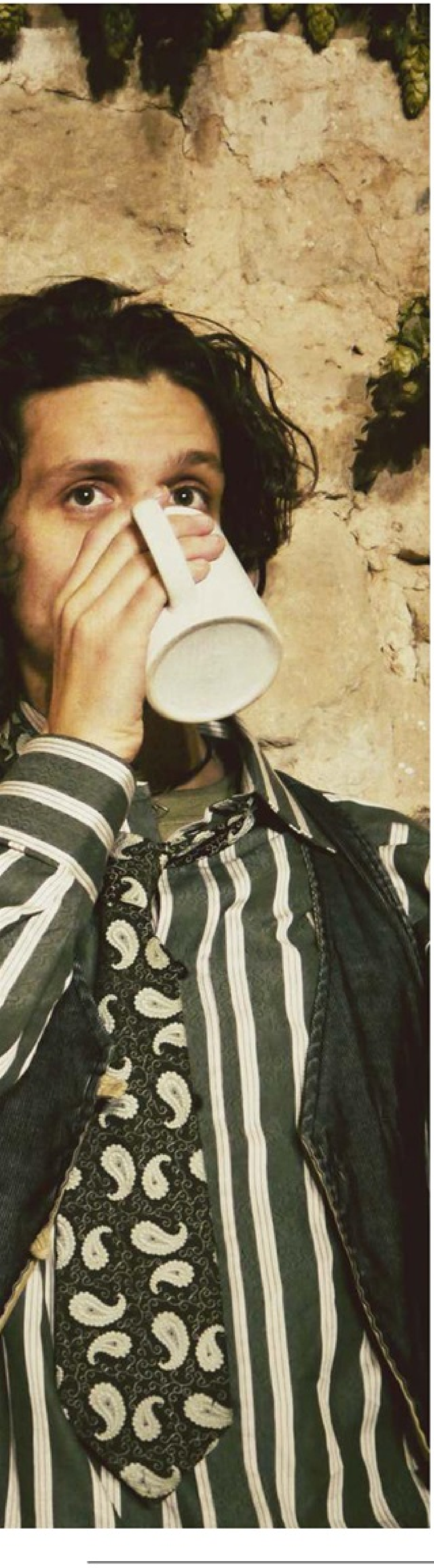
The Washburn's replacement guitar was off a friend who was selling one; Richie had given him £100 for it, an Epiphone acoustic that's very simple but does the trick for writing so long as it's in tune and the intonation is OK. Saying that, the multi-talented singer-songwriter does have his eye on a Martin D-12 – very much his dream guitar.

"What I'd love is a gypsy jazz guitar, handmade by some dude in France or something. With bespoke items from really fine luthiers, you can get something even beyond a Martin. At some point I'll get the guitar I'll be buried with whether it be the Martin D-12 or a custom bespoke job." ■

CC Smugglers' latest single 'Dirty Money' is out now. Info: www.ccsmugglers.co.uk

PLAYER TIP

Can you give *Acoustic* readers some advice on learning acoustic guitar?
Go watch loads of live music and find someone you watch and think: "Wow, I would love to play like that guitarist," then hang out or catch them on a fag break and explain to them that you're so passionate and would love to learn their style. Then ask them if they'd give you a one-off lesson or meet up with you. There is no better way of learning than from someone you admire. Musicians want to feel needed; they want to pass on information to players who really care.



INDIA ELECTRIC COMPANY

With backing from the highest folk authorities in the land, musical polymaths India Electric Company's mean business

Devon-born musicians the India Electric Company (Joseph O'Keefe on violin, piano, guitars, accordion. Cole Stacey on vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin) use traditional instruments in contemporary styles be they Eastern European, Irish or from further afield. After releasing their debut album *The Girl I Left Behind Me* in 2015 they began extensively supporting Midge Ure throughout Europe.

In 2017 they're starting their first tours of Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia and Ireland and presenting what they've described as their 'folkiest' release to date. Exploring traditional music from England and Scotland, *Seven Sisters* has been produced with assistance from EFDSS (English Folk Dance and Song Society) Creative Bursary scheme, but as they tell us here, their influences are not what you might expect...

When and how did India Electric Co. begin?
CS: Back in 2012 after Joseph kindly agreed to join me for some UK shows (which I suspect I still owe him for), we moved to Paris to learn Gypsy Jazz and instead formed an English folk duo.
JOK: When we were 12 we played in a party covers band with Cole on drums and me on bass. Then we parted ways while Cole started writing songs and touring, and I studied maths. India Electric Company exists because we both love exploring and trying to play a wide genre of music.

The new record is out on November 17. What can we expect from it?
CS: Traditional instruments used in contemporary ways, a body of work that reflects our research into songs collected in the early part of the twentieth century, Northumbrian fiddle tunes and our own connection with country and city themes.
JOK: The main premise of this record was to interpret some of our favourite English (or collected in England) folk songs and tunes. Hopefully our arrangements heighten the emotional content of the songs in a fresh way.

What are your plans for the rest of the year and into 2018?
CS: At the time of speaking we are currently halfway through a 37-date tour with Midge Ure, before we return for an album release at Cecil Sharp House and shows with Roy Wood. Our first UK tour begins in February before we head back to Germany shortly afterwards for some concerts.

You've got a really unique style. How would you describe the sound?
JOK: I think Mary Ann Kennedy summed it up best on BBC Radio 3 when she said, "A veritable musical magpies nest!"

How, and at what age, did you first get into your respective instruments?
CS: My Dad owned a music shop for years and consequently there was always guitars instead of sofas in our front room. I started learning guitar and singing properly at 18 and then mandolin about four years ago.
JOK: My dad used to offer me a choice between practicing an instrument or washing up, so I got into the violin and piano at six years old to avoid chores.

Who were your early musical influences?
CS: I think the first record I bought was Supergrass 'Richard III' but as a kid I was completely inspired by Paul Simon's solo records like *Hearts and Bones* (1983) and *Still Crazy After All These Years* (1975) and basically anything Leonard Cohen did.
JOK: My dad ran a ceilidh band so I was learning tunes straight away on violin. But Radiohead were the band who I adored most in my teens.

L-R: Joseph O'Keefe and Cole Stacey

"Listening to as many different songs is the way forward"

Who's inspiring you these days?
CS: The first Gloaming album (*The Gloaming*, 2014) changed our musical path for the better and is an incredible record. Currently I'm listening to Scott Walker's first album (*Scott*, 1967), Tom Waits *Bone Machine* (1992), anything by Estrella Morente and the wonderful Sam Lee.
JOK: I saw Abdullah Ibrahim play a solo improvised set at the Barbican which was 90 minutes of free exploration with hints of some of his recordings – there wasn't a repeated phrase throughout.

What gear are you using for the live shows?
CS: We've been touring with different model Faith guitars for the last three years including the Saturn Cutaway and they've been wonderful, using Elixir Nanoweb 13s on them. Ashbury have kindly provided us with a beautiful mandolin. We also recently started using a Strymon Blue Sky [reverberator pedal] with all three of our acoustic instruments.
JOK: I play a recently made violin by Michael Shakespeare from Blackheath with DPA 4099 microphone and a Fantini accordion with a pair of Accusound microphones and some homemade bass pedals.

Any interesting gear in your collections?
CS: We were once presented with a banjo when we played at a funeral which went on to be used on our first album. Midge has been very kind and let us play with various Moogs and synths lately.
JOK: Cole's dad brought back to life a beautiful Spanish guitar which has made it onto all of our recordings. It has such a beautiful tone.

Tell us about your songwriting processes?
CS: We write together and use references for each stage of the writing and production process. When we are drawn in certain themes, structures or time signatures we try to explore them in the freshest way we can.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?
CS: Every day feels pretty special to be honest but our first major live session on BBC 6 Music and walking out to perform with Midge in New Zealand stick in the mind at the moment.

Which artist/band, dead or alive, would you most like to perform with?
CS: I think backing vocals and percussion for Tom Waits would be up there for me.
JOK: I'd take a duet with Bill Evans.

Which song do you most wish you'd written?
CS: 'September In The Rain', Dinah Washington.
JOK: 'How to Disappear Completely', Radiohead.

We're always keen to get some advice from artists we speak to. Any top player tips?
CS: I was hoping you'd be able to provide me with some! Sparks had it spot on when they said "How do I get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, man, practice". Listening to and analysing as many different songs is the way forward from a songwriting point of view. Stagecraft I think is all about enjoying the music you're making and letting the audience be a part of that.
JOK: We've been using a piece of foam inserted at the bridge of the guitar to dampen the strings, which sounds the same as palm muting except it gives your right hand a bit more freedom to play – something I stole off Jerry Cahill, my old guitar teacher.

We're always keen to get some artist recommendations. Anyone floating your boat right now?
CS: Martin Hayes has a new album out which I'm very excited to hear when I get home, also Sarathy Korwar, as well as Nao – and as previously mentioned The Gloaming.
JOK: The last things in my playlist were Fred McDowell and Zazou Bikaye! ■

***Seven Sisters (Part II)* EP is out now via Shoelay Music.**
Info: www.indiaelectricco.com

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AISHA BADRU

The singer-songwriter caught up with Acoustic ahead of her debut LP release to talk inspiration, serial gear-buying and Cider House Rules

When asked to sum up her musical style, New York-based singer-songwriter Aisha Badru quite reasonably declines comment. "It's the hardest question," the 25-year-old explains. "I don't believe my music style really fits into a box." *Acoustic* can only sympathise with such a sentiment: Badru's beautiful vocal parts are pretty unique, her melodies clearly deeply instinctive rather than formulaic and that's before we even get to the lyrics. So let's instead talk facts: so far Badru's digital releases have notched up admirable listening figures worldwide and her music has recently been featured in a car ad, allowing her the financial freedom to focus on writing. She has toured the US, but the recording of her album took her to the UK. We found out more...

The new album is out soon. What can we expect from it?

I chose that title to represent the extreme polarities of light and dark that we all inevitably swing between throughout our lives. You can expect full production for the majority of the songs on the record, which is a stark comparison to my very stripped EP that I have online. I worked with a UK based music producer for this album and he brought an insanely creative touch to the tracks. There are lots of atmospheric vibes and we experimented with vocoders and other effects. You can also anticipate some songs on the album to be a step beyond my usual reflections on love.

Are you happy with how it turned out?

I'm super proud of this project! Sometimes I listen back to the album and I'm surprised that it's my own body of work! It can be mind-blowing to reflect on how far you have gone and how much you have grown; it's sort of like an out-of-body experience.

What plans have you got for 2018?

Besides releasing my album and playing live a lot more, I plan to do some more travel and finally start working on some documentary filmmaking. Other than that, I don't like to plan too much. Sometimes planning can be futile because at any moment a very unpredictable opportunity can present itself to you and it'd be best to be free enough to go with the flow.

How, and at what age, did you first get into playing the guitar?

I started learning the basic shapes of the major chords on the guitar at age 18 when I was a senior in high school. That year, I joined the guitar club as an afterschool programme, but I didn't advance much in my playability because I became the singer of the club. Then, a few years later when I was in my third year of college, I became really depressed, dropped out of all my classes, bought a guitar and taught myself how to play by watching YouTube tutorial videos... mostly Taylor Swift songs to be completely transparent.

What was the first song you learned to play on the guitar?

'Blackbird' by The Beatles.

Your voice is amazing. Have you had coaching, or did it always come naturally?

Thank you! I've never had any vocal coaching. I've always loved to sing, but when I started taking it more seriously I felt a little self-conscious because my voice was very soft and I was worried I would put people to sleep.

Who were your early musical influences?

Malaysian singer-songwriter, Yuna, was a pivotal influence when I first started my music journey back in 2014. Watching her videos online gave me the confidence that I needed to embrace the soft tone of my voice. She showed me that you can be delicate while still having a strong presence.

Who is inspiring you these days?

Berlin singer-songwriter, Alice Phoebe Lou, has been inspiring me to share my more socially conscious songs like 'Mind On Fire'. I had some initial reservations about sharing it because I didn't think anyone would care, but I was wrong because that song now has 4 million streams on Spotify. I'm going to continue to speak up about world issues through my music. Actually, I'm going to speak

"I constantly sell my guitars, then buy new ones"

about societal and world issues any chance that I get, because these things matter – and not enough people are talking about things that matter.

Do you play any other instruments?
I play the piano very minimally, and by minimally I mean that I can smash down a few chords and pray they sound good. Truthfully, I am a more of a writer than an instrumentalist. I really enjoy playing the guitar, but I love to write. I've always been mesmerised by words and feelings and the way that you can string them together to convey an emotion and transfer that emotion to a complete stranger.

What guitars/gear do you use for your live shows?
I'm a serial guitar buyer. I'm constantly selling my guitars and then buying new ones. Lately, I've been performing with a semi-hollow body Limited Edition Epiphone ES-335 PRO. The pedals I used for my most recent tour as an opening act for Radical Face are reverb (Polara by DigiTech), chorus (MXR Analog), and delay (Echobrain by TC Electronic).

How about in your personal collection, any rare or interesting instruments?
I had a very beautiful special edition Paul Reed Smith semi-hollow body guitar (PRS Custom 24). It was Sea Foam Green and had birds dancing along the fretboard. Unfortunately, I sold it a while ago to make room for some new equipment. I regret not keeping it as part of my collection.

Tell me about the songwriting process for you?
Writing is a spiritual experience for me. With that being said, I never know when divine inspiration is going to strike. At any time, I may be inspired by a word, an image, a feeling or an idea. My most popular song, 'Waiting Around' was written while I was watching the movie, *Cider House Rules.* I felt triggered by something one of the actors said, paused the movie, and wrote the song within 20 minutes. It's rare that I sit down with the objective to write a song.

There is a difference between writing from the mind and writing from the heart. When writing from the mind, I think too much about stringing together clever words and usually struggle to complete the song, so I stop and scrap it. When I write from the heart, I don't have to think about it, instead, I become a messenger.

Describe a typical day in your life?
My life has been changing pretty extensively. A year ago I would spend my day waking up to go to a job that I wasn't happy with, but now that I'm beginning to make a living off of my music, I have so much more free time. I'm usually contemplating all the ways that I'm going to take over the world

What has been your career highlight so far?
The past year has been the highlight of my career; my song was used in a Volkswagen advertisement, I reached over 13 million plays on Spotify, I finished my first album and I got signed to Nettwerk Records. This is the life that I dreamed of as a kid. This is the life that I was told was not feasible or realistic, and yet, I'm doing it.

What is your biggest ambition in music?
My biggest ambition in music is synonymous with my biggest ambition in life. My goal is to prove that no matter how divided we have been convinced that we are, we are all connected. We are connected through our emotions and we are connected through this experience on earth that we are all collectively taking part of. I hope to bring this message to the world, and so that means that I hope one day my music will reach billions.

Which song do you most wish that you had written?
'Landslide' by Fleetwood Mac. I have always been a huge fan of folk music, especially songs with beautifully poignant lyrics.

Do you have any tips for readers?
When it comes to songwriting, don't think... feel. For live performances, be sure to peel off some of your layers before you get on stage. Speak to your audience and allow them to see who you are behind the label of 'musician'.

Any artists floating your boat right now?
You know those crevices in your soul that are hard to reach? Moses Sumney's music has a way of scratching those places for me. He recently released his debut album *Aromanticism*... I also recommend checking out Alice Phoebe Lou's music; I feel like her and I are kindred spirits. ■

***Pendulum*, is out on March 2.**
Info: www.aishabadru.com

SEAN CHRISTOPER

The Dutch-born artist fills us in on his love of flamenco, McCartney and knowing when to start over

Formally educated as a drummer at the Royal Conservatory, The Hague, Dutch-born, Bristol-based composer Sean Christopher could have his pick of titles – but for *Acoustic*'s purposes let's focus on the fact that he's very much a flamenco guitar aficionado, with an immersion in the tradition that goes back to childhood.

He may have attained the sought-after accolade of having written for a car ad but Christopher's true ambitions are very much more down-to-earth, his recently-released 'Paper Plane Pilot' focussing on the story of a young boy who lives in a refugee camp. The track features on Christopher's forthcoming debut album *Yonder*, due for release in early 2018. He told us a bit more...

What can we expect from *Yonder*?
It's a record I've done all by myself, from writing to playing to recording it. It hasn't been without struggle. I started writing songs mainly focused on the production of it, instead of the songs themselves and lost touch. I started over with nothing but a guitar and no computer, and when I felt confident the songs were strong enough and I could really play them, I started the producing/recording process. I would describe it as a melodic, alternative pop music album. Honest songs with lyrics inspired by matters that are really important to me.

You've got a really unique style. How would you describe it?
I'd say pure, melodic and slightly melancholic.

How, and at what age, did you first get into playing the guitar?
My dad is a flamenco guitarist. I saw him practising the guitar every day. At the age of eight I wanted him to teach me how to play, so he showed me the basics, but my hands were way too small and I did not have the patience and strength either. Also because he was my dad he didn't have the authority you need of a music teacher. So I put away the guitar, started drumming, even studied jazz drums later on. I picked up the guitar again somewhere around the age of 16.

Who were your early musical influences?
Music from the 60s and 70s like The Beatles, Bowie, Cohen. The Police as well.

And who's inspiring you these days?
Difficult to say. I mean there is so much out there! The music that draws my attention mostly happens to be melodically interesting though. I love what Radiohead is doing. Jeff Buckley has always been magic to me. I saw a concert of Elbow not too long ago which was absolutely mind blowing.

Can you describe your songwriting process for us?
I tend to write most of my songs on guitar. I usually sit down, jam guitar and sing along phonetically. As soon as I'm comfortable with a melody I start seeking the right words. Usually I know what the song needs to be about by then.

Which artist or band, dead or alive, would you most like to perform with?
Many! But Paul McCartney crossed my mind just now.

Which song do you most wish you'd written?
'Blackbird', by Paul McCartney.

Any artist tips?
Recently I found out about Leiff Vollebekk.

What are your plans for 2018?
Introduce my album to the world and follow up with some great shows! ■

'Paper Plane Pilot', the first single from Sean Christopher's new album *Yonder* is out now. Info: www.seanchristopher.net

"My music is pure, melodic ...and slightly melancholic"

Gear Box

Live: One of my dad's handmade flamenco guitars, built by Daniel Anthony Slaman in Holland in 1987 and a Vicente Sanchis guitar from Spain.
Amps/effects: A lightweight AER Compact 60/3; a tube Radial FireFly DI (to make my guitar/amps sound a little less clean).

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FRANK TUR

He's one of the most-loved modern singer-songwriters. But has Frank Turner gone as far as he can with acoustic music? Dan Hobson finds out...

PHOTOS: JORDAN HARRIS

Frank Turner has been described as one of the hardest-working musicians of our time; the number of shows he has played in the last decade has become the stuff of legend. Tonight he will perform gigs 2,122 and 2,123 in Kingston upon Thames. Turner has decided to play two shows after receiving messages from upset under-18s who can't attend his full-band show at the Hippodrome. He will, therefore, perform a solo acoustic gig at Banquet Records store nearby after finishing soundcheck for the main gig… "I'm a sucker for punishment and I like keeping everybody happy," he says with a laugh.

When we sit down for a chat in the venue, Turner explains that he is, in fact, taking things easier these days. "There was a long period in my life where I was engaged in this very macho arms race to be the hardest working, hardest touring guy," he admits while his band, The Sleeping Souls, soundcheck in the background. "But I realised it was killing all of us – and not in a good way. I want to do this for the rest of my life and I can't do it like I did in my 20s forever."

Now 35, Turner is "being a civilian most of the time", spending time at home with his girlfriend and cat. "Having said that, I'll never stop touring because I love it – performing is the thing in life that I'm definitely good at," he laughs. "There is an endless list of things I'm not very good at, but this is the one thing I can do well. I'm lucky because not everybody gets that in life. I love entertaining a crowd, I love being on the road, I love being in a different place every day; it makes life go by more slowly. And that's cool."

At the time of speaking, Turner is on the cusp of releasing new album *Songbook*, which will bring together highlights from across his six albums alongside 10 reimagined versions of some of his most popular tracks. The release will also include new song 'There She Is' and the deluxe version includes his 'Get Better' documentary film.

While this album is essentially a 'best of', Turner does refer to at least two new albums in the pipeline. He explains that he was writing a concept record about women who have been forgotten by the history books, then shelved it amid recent political revelations. "I wrote that record, then 2016 happened – Brexit and Trump – and I thought, 'Oh fuck, I'm going to have to write another album.'"

However, he is cautious to call it a political record, possibly due to the fall-out in 2012 when *The Guardian* published – somewhat unfairly – a collection of political comments he made in various interviews, ensuing in hate mail and death threats for the performer. "I'm in two minds whether to say it's a political record," he explains. "I don't have a problem with provocation as an artistic strategy, but it's not a Billy Bragg record, it's not a Rage Against The Machine record."

Perhaps more controversially (for this magazine anyway) I ask Turner about an article I read where he said that he had taken the country/folk/punk thing as far as he could – and fancied recording an Electronic Dance Music record. "Sort of..." he says with a laugh. "Now just feels like the time to do something else. I've never made records which have any thought about dancing before. As an angry teenager who hated rave music and would listen to NOFX, I would have found the very idea of even saying that slightly reprehensible. But I am intrigued by the idea of making a record at least parts of which could be played in a club.

"I just want to make a record which doesn't sound like something I've made before. It might well be that it comes out and everybody says, 'Oh it's another Frank Turner record'. Or alternatively everybody goes, 'Jesus Christ'. I can't really judge what the reaction will be. Artists have a duty to exist out of their comfort zone, though. I could quite happily turn in another *England Keep My Bones* or *Positive Songs for Negative People* and I don't wanna do that – I don't see the point. Those records already exist and we still play songs from them."

But then, Turner's journey to becoming one of the best-loved contemporary singer-songwriters began a fair way from the acoustic guitar. Aged 10, Turner happened upon the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert – and could not find a VHS tape to record it on fast enough. "I watched it with my older sister with our jaws in our laps," he remembers. "It was quite an introduction, you had Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Queen, Zeppelin, Spinal Tap,

"There was a long period in my life where I was engaged in this very macho arms race to be the hardest working, hardest touring guy. But I realised it was killing all of us"

NER

© Getty Images

who we didn't realise were a joke and couldn't understand why everyone kept laughing when they said something."

He got his first guitar for his 11th birthday, after being bugged by a friend with a drum kit who was looking for a jamming partner. "My parents got me the Argos starter kit with a black and white Strat copy and a little 30-watt amp. I still have that somewhere. My mum also got me the *Bert Weedon Play In A Day* book. The first song I learned was 'Knocking On Heaven's Door', which I firmly believed was a Guns N' Roses song at the time," he admits.

Turner's musical career began at school, with the short-lived alternative band Kneejerk. The group released three records and played several shows around the UK. In 2001, Turner joined London post-hardcore band Million Dead at the invitation of former Kneejerk drummer Ben Dawson. In 2005, after four years and two albums, the band announced that they were parting ways.

In his song 'The Ballad of Me and My Friends', from *Campfire Punk Rock*, Turner hints that, following the split, he only went solo because he "lacked the friends to form a band". How much truth is there to that lyric? "That was a slight dig at quite a lot of people, not just myself," he says with a chuckle. "Towards the end of Million Dead I'd started listening to a lot of different kinds of music: Americana, folk, and country. It was also very liberating to be a self-contained musical unit after being in a band."

"I told everybody that I was going to be a professional touring musician for the rest of my life and everybody laughed"

Another massive influence was performing – and hanging around with musicians – at Nambucca on Holloway Road, in London. "It was full of a conglomerate of waifs and strays," he remembers. "It's funny, a lot of successful musicians came out of that place: Laura Marling, Marcus Mumford showed up every now and again. There's a line in 'I Knew Prufrock Before He Got Famous' about English boys with banjos which was specifically a rip on Marcus because he used to play banjo at the open mic night and we thought he was an idiot... then he sold a million records! There was Justin [Hayward-Young], who is now a singer in The Vaccines. There was just a lot of people, we were all young, and we didn't know what we were doing – we were just playing acoustic shows."

I tell Turner how Beans on Toast remembered the Nambucca scene fondly in *Acoustic* a few issues ago. "It was all of our halcyon days. And Jay was the centre of it, actually. He was one of the big reasons why I picked up an acoustic guitar because he was playing these Beans On Toast songs. With Million Dead it took us six months to write a song then we'd try and make it more obscure and more complicated. Then Jay played three chords and sung a song about last weekend, and that was a very sudden realisation about what folk music should be. It's a form of communication within a community and Jay was a real eye-opener to me."

Since then, Turner has essentially been on one long tour; from tiny venues to selling out arenas. There are too many highlights,

Gear Box

For the live shows I've settled on Gibson Hummingbirds. Having learned to play in a punk rock band, I play very hard. You can beat the fuck out of a Gibson Hummingbird and they're generally alright. I went through a lot of different types of guitars in my early days. I played Patrick James Eggle acoustic guitars for a while, which are phenomenal but could not take the battering.

The second main part of my arsenal is my Fishman Aura Spectrum DI. It's great – it makes an acoustic guitar sound like an acoustic guitar. I have a Boss T2 tuner as well, and that's it. Very simple, but very specifically chosen gear. I also play a Gibson LE hollow body electric guitar.

In my personal collection I have a 1957 Gibson Country and Western, which is a fucking beast of a guitar. It was bought by a businessman as a kind of trophy and never played. It's in mint condition – as it would have been in the 50s. It's the ideal acoustic to me; not fancy but it plays like a dream and it sounds great.

My absolute fucking top-of-the-pile pride and joy, though, is a 1942 D'Angelico archtop which used to belong to Loudon Wainwright III. I was in a vintage guitar shop in Oslo, Norway, and I saw it on a stand and thought, "That's a really nice guitar" and started playing it. The owner came over and told me Loudon used to own it.

Loudon Wainwright is a massive songwriting inspiration for me, I'm a huge fan. I didn't believe him at first, but I managed to get a picture of it to Martha Wainwright, who confirmed its authenticity. Then the shop owner explained that he shared a flat with him in New York and when Louden moved out, he gave him this guitar as a parting gift. I absolutely love it. I would never do a show with it – it never leaves the house. It's just got gravitas. You pick it up and your fingers go to new places.

he explains. Performing Wembley Stadium and finding out his music was on Bruce Springsteen's iTunes playlist – "that was pretty fucking cool" – are some obvious highlights. But the thing Turner is most proud of strikes a little closer to the heart.

"When I was a kid playing guitar in my friends' bedrooms and doing shitty DIY tours in the school holidays, I told everybody that I was going to be a professional touring musician for the rest of my life and everybody laughed and said, 'Grow the fuck up'. A lot of bands get to release one, maybe two, records. And I do this for a living, I'm about to release my seventh record next year, I've got several projects on the go and I'm fucking proud of that. I'm actually doing what I said I was gonna do. I know this makes me sound like I'm flipping off my teachers still, at the age of 35 which is slightly undignified. Nevertheless, it's like, yes, I'm fucking doing this actually – go fuck yourself!"

Surprisingly, however, Turner does not take full credit for his success. "It so completely comes down to luck," he explains. While Turner might feel like he's doing a job that "lots of people could do", I suggest that there's more to it than simply luck. "You need to have the three things: talent, luck, and drive," he concedes. "Two of those things you can control and one of them you can't. So you've gotta just recognise your fortune in life, I suppose. I don't have an office job, I don't have to wear a suit, I don't have to get up and commute at 9am on a Monday and that's awesome," he chuckles.

On the subject of commutes, I was unable to catch Turner's show at the Hippodrome because it would have meant missing my last train to Bristol. However, I was lucky enough to get along to his acoustic set at Banquet Records' store, who were hosting both shows.

© Getty Images

Player Tip

Pick an artist whose songwriting intrigues you and figure out the chord structures to their songs. It's like going underneath a car; you observe the internal infrastructure of what you're interested in.

> **"Marcus Mumford used to play banjo at the open mic night and we thought he was an idiot... then he sold a million records"**

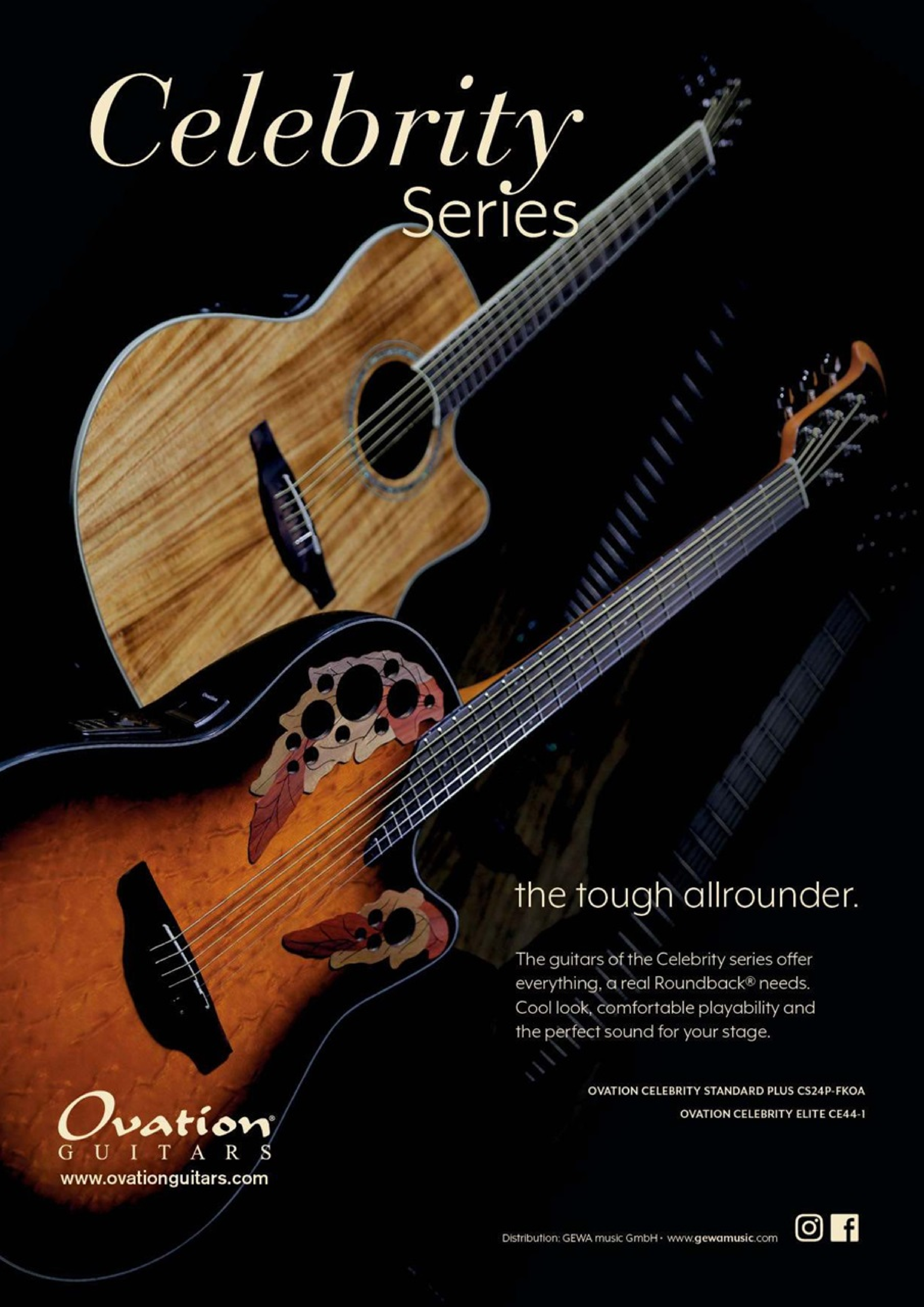
Turner's short – but heartfelt – set was incredible. It reminded me of the first time I saw him play, supporting The Levellers in 2008. So moved was I by Turner's solo acoustic set then, that I purchased his album *Love Ire & Song* the following day – and it became my favourite CD for a good while.

The 20-or-so lucky fans in attendance hung onto Turner's every word and sung back every lyric (aside from the two new tunes he played). That's the great thing about Turner; he speaks the truth as he sees it in his songs – and it connects with people. How does he go about penning them, though? "If I had a short answer to that question I would write it in a book and become a millionaire," Turner chuckles.

"Songwriting is a multi-stage, multi-layered process. It's partly an art and partly a craft. You can learn the craft. The art side of it remains indecipherable – and I think it should stay like that. There is a phenomenon of modern pop songs which sound so overwritten; like somebody who knows a bit too much about the craft side and isn't concentrating on the art side enough. But, sometimes those songs sell a million copies, so what the fuck do I know.

"Then sometimes you just get an idea that fills you with joy and excitement and you just can't wait to find a pen and paper." ■

Songbook is out now.
Info: www.frank-turner.com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VIDEO EXTRA! For video demos of all of this issue's featured guitars, and many more, visit: www.youtube.com/user/guitbrett

Our resident vintage expert gives us another history lesson. This month: a Gibson with bittersweet memories...

GIBSON F-25 FOLKSINGER

They say if you can remember the 60s then you weren't there. Obviously made up by someone born in the 70s or beyond. Yes, it was probably the most creative and barrier-breaking time on the planet in many ways for Mr. Average, but it was also just another time where people existed and went about their daily lives on Planet Earth. The Peace and Love image was indeed inhaled by many for a while but then Vietnam happened. I never saw many of my American friends again who were drafted into that cauldron of death. I remember having an acoustic session in a place named Cornucopia situated at the end of Tottenham Court Road and there as usual, was a really great American acoustic songwriter name Glen Strong. He was in a sad mood that evening and he showed me his call-up papers. He left for the States a couple of days later and I never saw or heard from him again. One of the acoustic guitars that is synonymous with this era is the Gibson F-25 Folksinger, fondly referred to as the Summer of Love guitar (pictured left). In fact, it was quite a cumbersome beast that had a Spanish look to it because of its flamenco-style tap plates. It wasn't one of Gibson's finest but it was a child of the time and therefore sits right in the midst of the hippy/flower power generation. The body is classical in design but steel strung and 00 in size. The neck was wide and some players found that uncomfortable to handle. I found it more suitable for chordal strumming that fingerpicking. **https://youtu.be/SZima3vtQCg**

HOWE-ORME

A good few years ago on the collecting trail I came across a rare and very interesting mandolinetto that was crafted by a company in the States by the name of Howe-Orme. What caught my eye was the beautiful roll top made of spruce with mahogany back and sides, rosewood neck with an ebony fingerboard. Howe-Orme traded in the States in the late 1800s and created a whole family of mandolin designs including mandolinettos and mandocellos. They are unique in design having an identifiable raised top but are more mini guitar shaped than traditional mandolins and they have flat backs. I have one (pictured right) which also has the original fitted case which is a bonus when collecting such instruments. The condition of my example is excellent with no issues whatsoever. That is most important in the field of collecting. But in many cases, you have to remember that the elderly pieces may also have repairs and replacement parts because time, wear and tear may have taken their toll over the years. In many cases, professional and stable repairs have been made and therefore (providing they are indeed professional repairs done to a high standard) value should not be affected greatly. Also, rarity is important to remember too. I do not have a video of this instrument as I'm not the greatest mandolin player! But you can tell from the photograph that it is a beauty.

GOLDKLANG ARCHTOP

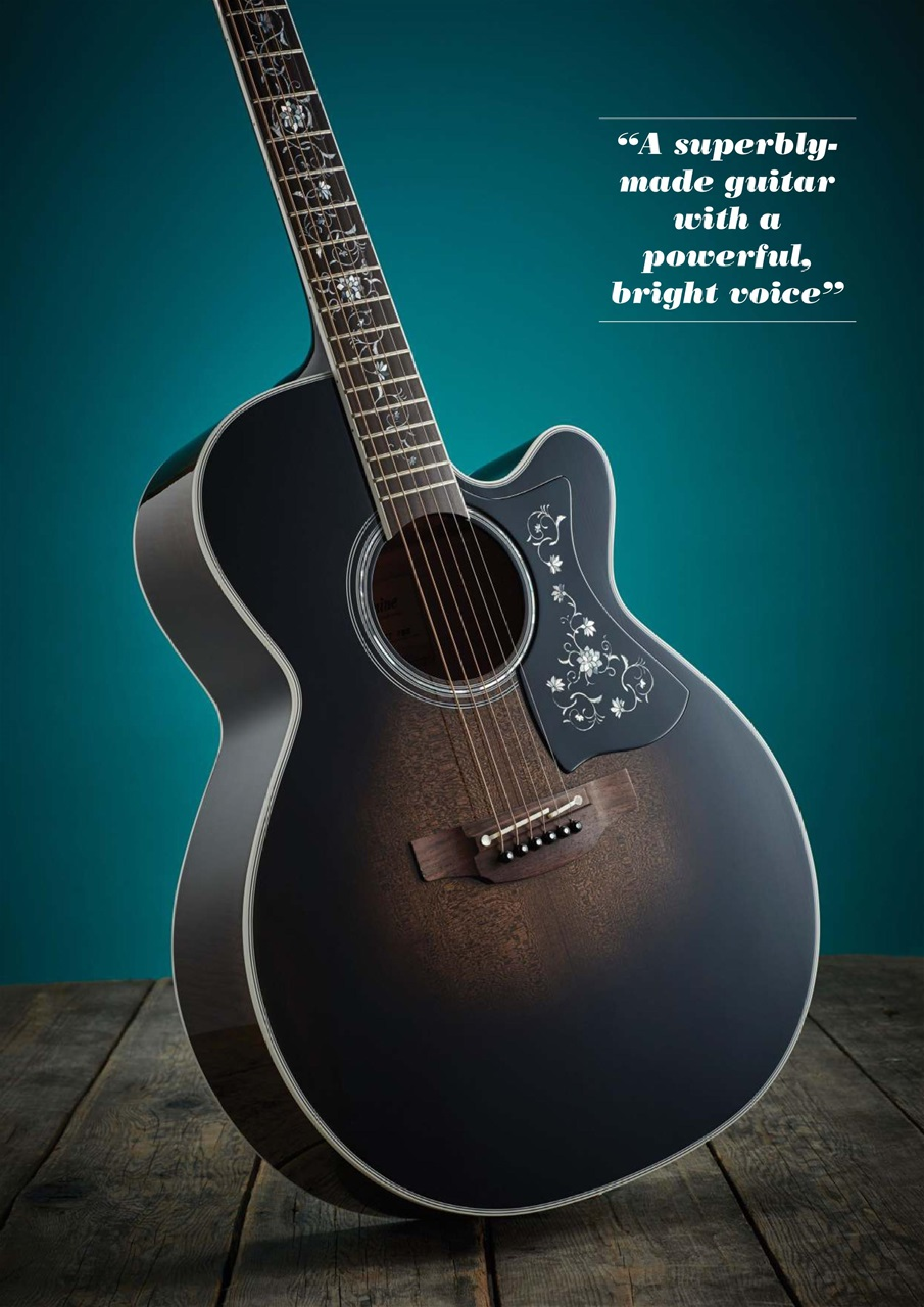
Semi-acoustic archtops have never really caught on in a big way; however, in the 50s and early 60s, brands like Höfner had their heyday. Gibson too produced some iconic guitars in this genre. The former were preferred by early European rock 'n' rollers and then later by American guitarists in both early rock and jazz fields, with a small blues crossover. In Europe during that period there was also in existence a bloody great wall in Berlin that divided West Germany from East Germany. The Russians controlled the East with an iron fist and it became a very dangerous situation for many years until the wall finally came down in 1989. During this time, there were luthiers plying their trade in the East and I must add, they were making some very fine sounding and attractive instruments, including archtops. While Höfners were a product of the West, brands like Goldklang were being crafted in the East. Kurt Seifert and his son Heinz were creating what are now iconic and historical guitar designs. There is not a great deal of information about the Seiferts but they are legends in their sphere and their guitars are quite rare to source. I owned a Goldklang archtop for a few years that was in itself an amazing looker and player. I think it was more likely to have been made by Kurt as it bears some of his black and white accessories that gives this particular guitar an art deco appearance with its piano key design scratchplate. They were also the designers of Migma Guitars. Here's a video of my Goldklang (pictured left): **https://youtu.be/wdVFVk7yiM0**

"Time, wear and tear take their toll"

LE VOI DOUBLE NECK

My final offering for this article is an original handcrafted double neck, made for me by UK Luthier John Le Voi in 1980 (pictured above). I was introduced to John's work by Sky guitarist Kevin Peek, who at the time, owned a Le Voi six-string. I had long been contemplating having a double neck made with six and 12 strings but using nylon strings instead of steel. At this time, I was recording an album for TV Company K-Tel entitled *Romantic Guitar*. Kevin was adding some back up guitar on the album and I liked the sound of his Le Voi six-string. I called John and we discussed this project and what I wanted to get out of it playing and sound wise. We agreed a price and then it was down to John's skills to produce the instrument. In the meantime, I finished the album which also featured a full orchestra and was compiled of classic songs played with guitar, both acoustic and electric as the lead instruments. In fact, when released under my name, it went into the top 20 UK album charts, a feat that only Gordon Giltrap and I have managed to achieve as UK solo acoustic guitarists outside of the classical genre of players. When I finally took delivery of the double neck it was a beauty and lived up to all expectations. I strung it with a normal set of classical strings on the six-string neck and a course of lute strings on the 12-string. The action and ease of playing between the necks was also easy and I got stuck into developing a concerto for it. Which reminds me, I have lots of sketches on tape somewhere that I must dig out and complete the piece. Have a listen for yourself: **https://youtu.be/m6lN8N8ahFE**

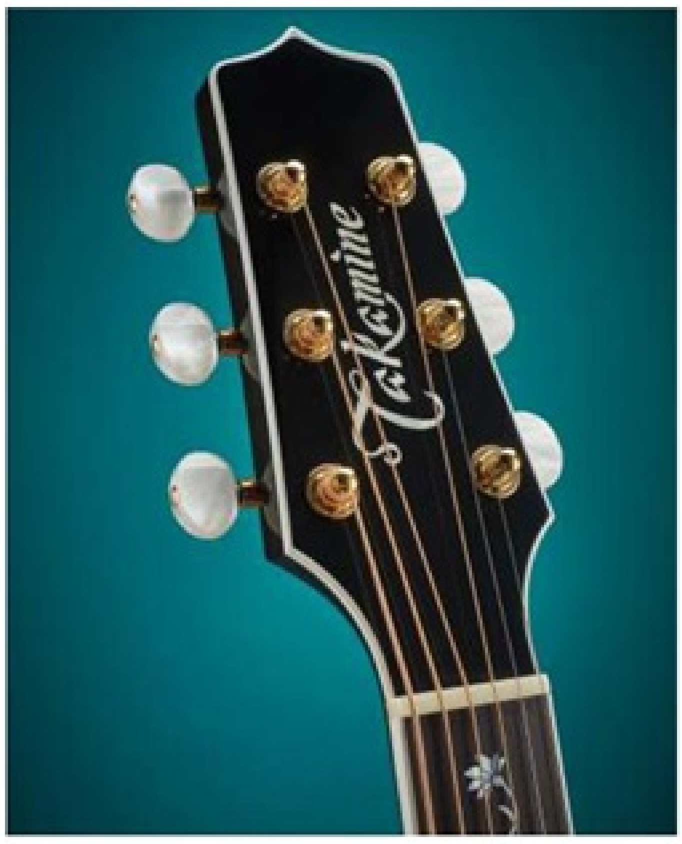
Paul Brett's new album, *Suite Viator*, is available now. Info: www.paulbrettguitarist.co.uk



"A superbly-made guitar with a powerful, bright voice"

TAKAMINE EF450C-TT TBB

Alun Lower has a zen moment with this Japanese-built instrument that aims to impart an old tone on a new guitar



It's a widely held belief in acoustic guitar circles that older guitars are just, well... better than their younger counterparts. For all the bells and whistles that a new six-stringer could possibly throw into the equation, most players would agree that experience trumps all as the tonewoods age and open up naturally to develop their true character over time. Quite often in reviews, you'll see a writer wax lyrical about a new guitar, only to add the caveat "but imagine how good it'll sound after a few years of playing!". There's definitely a certain excitement to be felt with a high-end guitar, knowing that your tone can only get better as the years of playing go by, but... what if you could have all that straight away?

That's the bold claim that Takamine is making with their new 'Thermal Series' guitars, which feature tops that have been treated to a torrefaction process, where the wood has been baked in a high-heat, low-oxygen environment. It's not a new idea, but it's always an intriguing prospect and it'll be interesting to see what kind of performance this Takamine will deliver.

BUILD QUALITY

For once it's not easy to pick out a starting point for discussion when it comes to the guitar's build – there's a lot going on here! But I'll keep it traditional for now and start with the basics. The EF450C-TT sports a thermally-treated spruce top, flanked with the rather flashy accompaniment of flamed maple back and sides, all finished in a deep 'Transparent Black Burst' gloss. It's a striking look for sure, and the level of finishing thankfully stands up well to the fancy appointments, with the gloss perfectly smooth across the entire body and the interior woodwork looking every bit as flawless as you'd expect from a handmade instrument. The crisp white pinstripe binding frames the guitar nicely from head to toe, adding some much-needed definition to the overall aesthetic. There are those I know who'd automatically switch off when the words 'flamed maple' are mentioned, but thankfully the transparent burst finish adds a smoky, classy vibe that shows off the figuring of the wood without looking gaudy.

> **"You can rest assured that the work here is masterfully done"**

Elsewhere, the visual flourishes are a little more difficult to defend. While there's absolutely no doubt that the extraordinarily intricate inlays adorning the pickguard and striped ebony fingerboard show off an incredible amount of skill, the question of taste does have to be addressed and I have to admit that I find these kinds of inlays rather offputting, both from a purely aesthetic sense and also a practical one, with the design capable of confusing your hands when you're getting used to the instrument for the first time. Of course, this is completely subjective – and if these kinds of inlays are to your tastes then you can rest assured that the work here is masterfully done, with hundreds of pieces of abalone and pearl coming together to form a very striking design. Inlay work aside, the visual statement is equally bold when it comes to the hardware, with gold strap buttons and gold/pearl tuners adding into the equation.

With the looks of the guitar dominating much of the discussion it would be very easy to overlook the fact that the EF450C-TT has stealthily packed away an electronics package into the bargain, with Takamine's TLD-2 Line Driver preamp and Palathetic pickup system offering the versatility to take this guitar to the stage. Whether this system will work for you is once again a very subjective issue – the TLD-2 features no tone controls whatsoever and is designed purely to amplify the pure tones of the Palathetic pickup, the idea being that the signal will remain strong and high quality even with longer cables, leaving you to shape your tone with your amplification and effects equipment

instead. For the right player this won't be too much of a problem, but it could be a sticking point for those that are after more of an all-in-one solution.

All in all it really is a tale of two halves when it comes to discussing the EF450C-TT's build quality. The looks are as polarising as they get, but take away that side of the debate and there's no doubt that the guitar is exceptionally well-built, with quality tonewoods, top-drawer craftsmanship, superb playability and expanded versatility thanks to the electronics package.

SOUND QUALITY

There's sometimes a risk with maple-bodied acoustics that the overall tone can be a tad harsh and brittle, but thankfully that's not the case with the EF450C-TT. The maple and spruce combo does of course deliver a bright and treble-focused sound, but it never gets too much and retains a very musical, throaty voice throughout that offers plenty of depth and zinging harmonics. It's a very 'hi-fi' tone that sounds polished and almost rehearsed – you know what you want this guitar to deliver and it does that with aplomb, like a West End singer who's been belting out the same tunes every night for a whole season. Whether that's due to the thermal top is down for debate, but to my ears the EF450-

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Takamine
Model: EF450C-TT TBB
RRP: £2,169
Body Size: NEX cutaway [as per Takamine's description; more commonly, Grand Auditorium]
Made In: Japan
Top: Solid 'thermal' spruce
Back and Sides: Solid flamed maple (back), flamed maple (sides)
Neck: Maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Nut Width: 1.68" (42.55mm)
Scale Length: 25.35" (644mm)
Onboard Electrics: TLD-2 Line Driver preamp and Palathetic pickup system
Finishes Available: Gloss transparent blackburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build quality: ★★★★☆
Sound quality: ★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superb build quality, exceptional playability and bright, expressive tones
Cons: Lack of tone-shaping controls, divisive looks, quite pricey
Overall: A well-built acoustic that needs to be matched to the right player to reach its full potential

CONTACT DETAILS

www.korguk.com/takamine

TT certainly doesn't sound like it needs to 'open up' before it can be fully enjoyed.

The slim neck and cutaway lend themselves nicely to a variety of styles, with both fingerstyle and flatpicking well-accommodated in a very comfy playing experience. Tonally, I'm not sure the maple back and sides offer enough mids to really excel at fingerstyle, but as far as strumming goes, chords and lead passages all sound lively, defined and detailed. Acoustically the body has plenty of volume and projection too, giving the guitar a strong and distinct voice that stands apart in the mix nicely with voices and other instruments alike.

Plugged in, Takamine's in-house pickup and preamp combo delivers pretty much exactly what you expect – a very clear, natural tone that sounds a little ordinary in isolation but comes to life once you introduce some EQ from your particular setup and possibly a few effects into the mix. String separation and clarity are very good, which is exactly what you want from this kind of unit, but if you're the type that prefers to just plug into a PA and go, I suspect you might find yourself pining for an onboard tuner and tone-shaping controls for on-the-fly adjustments.

CONCLUSION

It's tricky to offer a definitive opinion on this latest offering from Takamine, chiefly because of the love-it-or-hate-it looks and the fact that the guitar does some things especially well, while others less so. The EF450C-TT is a superbly-made guitar with a powerful and bright (yet perfectly balanced) voice that will lend itself extremely well to flatpickers that prefer that more contemporary end of the sonic spectrum. I find myself convinced that the thermal top helps, as well – the tone is open, detailed and richly textured and I really enjoyed playing with it. If you have a decent live setup in terms of pedals, amps and the like, then the pickup system used here will also suit you nicely, giving you plenty of opportunity for your extra gadgets to work their magic with a high quality, consistent signal that won't need too much messing around with from the guitar side of things.

However, for those who are more demanding in terms of electro features, and anyone who employs a multitude of styles or prefers a warmer, more 'woody' tone, this guitar probably won't quite scratch your itch. Ultimately, whatever the case, I'd suggest trying before you buy in this instance. Much like buying clothes that make a statement – if the shirt doesn't fit then it really won't work out, but if it does, you're going to stand out from the crowd in the best way possible. ■

SIGMA LGMC-SG100F

Can this new Sigma bring life to one of Tchaikovsky's choral works – while, as the brochure suggests, posing on a motorbike? Ollie McGhie finds out

Between the years 2007 and 2011 there was no Sigma. In 2007 the line was discontinued by CF Martin & Co. For four years Sigma faded into virtual anonymity, but in 2011 they were picked up by German company AMI Musical Instruments and brought back into production, only this time in China (prior to this they'd been made in Japan and Korea). Sigma is now a strong, reputable brand in the marketplace and they offer a good variety of instruments. It's not the acoustic bass, mandolin or ukulele I'll be reviewing though, but one of the latest in their line of steel-strung SG series guitars.

The Sigma LGMC-SG100F model has the aura of a smart, chic guitar with an urban edge. Visually, its most distinctive feature is the Florentine cutaway, which looks like a teardrop, or a speech bubble for a graphic novel. It is elegant and has something of a rococo flourish to it. The solid sitka spruce top features a sunburst hue – not your fiery red type, this one has a creamy ochre tinge giving it a slightly austere edge, so this guitar may not be for the Little Richards out there.

Like the top, the dark mahogany back and sides of the guitar have been lacquered to the nth degree with a high gloss, which contrasts well with the more subdued matt of the neck (also made from mahogany). The guitar comes with a useful allen key for adjusting the truss rod to your bespoke string height, though, given the gloss, a mini fire extinguisher wouldn't go amiss.

The spruce top features a very necessary tortoise-shell pickguard for such a highly burnished instrument. Like Art and Lutherie's Roadhouse Tennessee Red I reviewed a couple of months ago this guitar also has smart white binding (an industry standard plastic composite) looping around the top and back and circling the sound-hole, emphasising its clear-cut edges. On the tuning head, ivoroid knobs have such a clean, unembellished design you'd think they were made from real ivory (not cotton fibres dissolved in nitric acid). The reverse of the headstock reveals open-geared Grover Nickel machinery – a fitting juxtaposition of design elements all neatly packed at the top of what is a well designed and considered instrument.

The Sigma LGMC-SG100F has a bright, responsive sound (the hard bone/compensated saddle transmits sound instantly to the soundboard), which contrasts well with my sublime, gravelly, cold-infused, baritone vocals. Move over Richard Hawley. The guitar's chordal playing sound is percussive without too much buzz. It does a particularly good job of Tchaikovsky's choral work, 'The Crown of Roses': the tenor and bass parts show the guitar to have hidden depths in the lower melodious range, while the top end has some sweet tones that could add dulcet murmurings to your solo playing. The strings are at the optimum height, so the action is swift and the smaller body (compared to an 000 or jumbo size) makes it a snug instrument to play. My left hand handles the neck with ease and the trapezium shaped mother of pearl fingerboard markers decorate the micarta fingerboard (in all the standard places) making it easy to navigate. It's worth noting that if there is a + sign after the code on the box the fingerboard will be made of micarta – if not it will be rosewood, owing to changeover due to CITES.

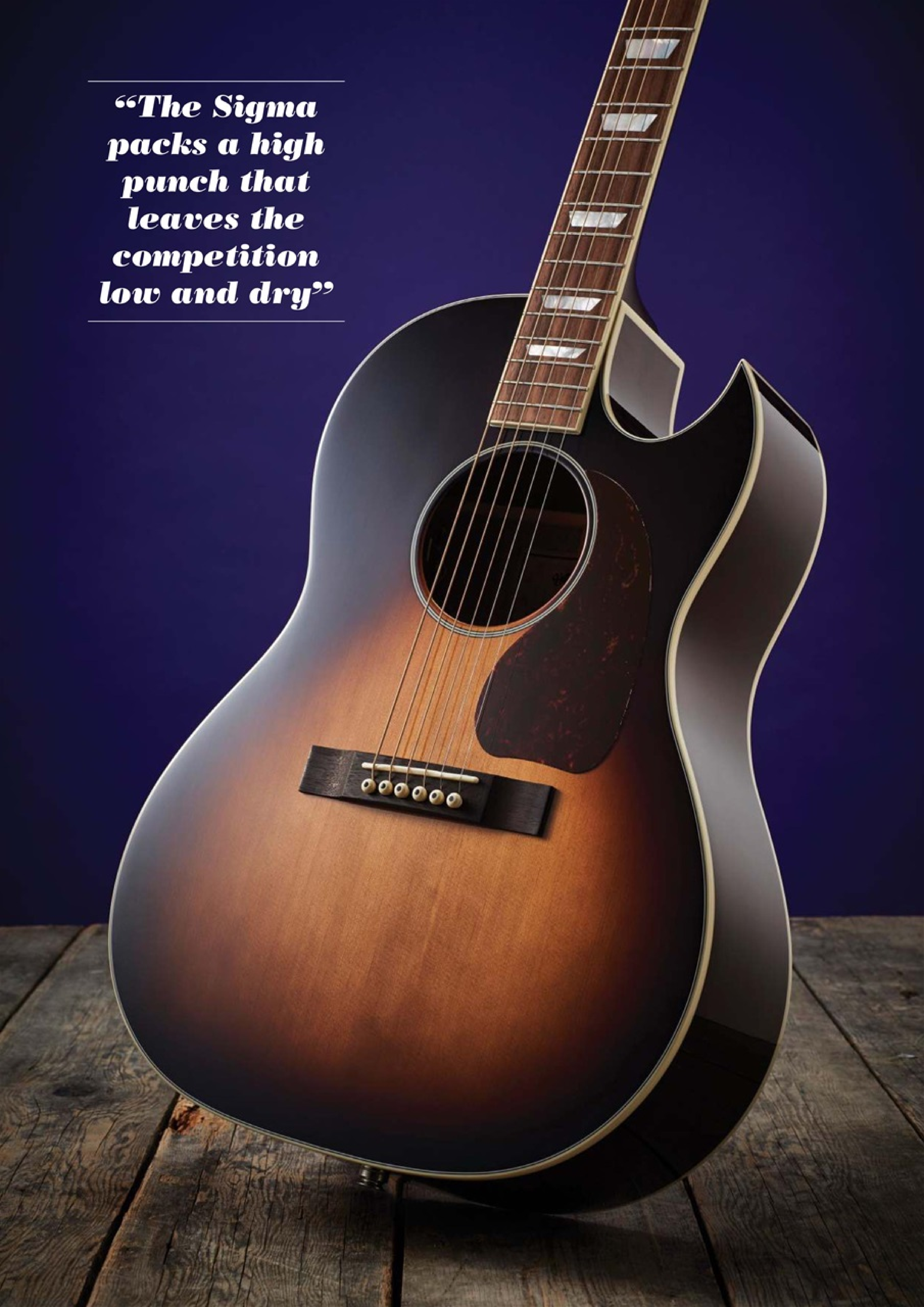
"The cutaway has something of a Rococo flourish to it"

Comparing the Sigma with an instrument with similar specs for front back and sides – in this case a Blueridge BR-43 000, the Sigma shines. Not only does the cutaway give it a distinct advantage – the action, tone and playability are all of a markedly superior nature. With both guitars pitching in the same price range, it's pretty obvious which one you'd go for. While the Blueridge is obviously a larger bodied instrument, the Sigma packs a high punch that leaves the other low and dry.

The harmonics and resonance at the top end of the Sigma are something I've not heard before. Immediately after the 16th fret on the top E string, where the fingerboard meets the body – the reverberations take on a sustain-cum-chorus effect, even when playing staccato. After stopping the note you can still hear the harmonics – as if echoing in the far-off depths of a cave. It's a slightly eerie effect and in no way detrimental to the sound unless you need absolute silence between breaks in the music.

Unlike many other acoustic fingerboards, this one does not continue infinitely into the sound hole. In fact it finishes a good two to three centimetres before the sound-

"The Sigma packs a high punch that leaves the competition low and dry"



hole and immediately in-line with the innermost edge of the Florentine cutaway. This is some carefully-considered design and a leading reason why it feels so easy to play at the top end. Any awkward left-hand stretching is left at the wayside and it feels like you could be playing at the seventh, or even the fifth fret.

There's no nut for straps at the neck-body join so you'll need to take a strap around the neck. In terms of acoustic performance, the Sigma provides enough versatility of tone to capture most repertoire with convincing aplomb – from fingerstyle, to easy jazz and blues. With electronics in place as well the Sigma can take this repertoire further afield.

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Sigma
Model: LGMC-SG100F
RRP: £535
Body Size: LG14 fret Florentine cutaway (00)
Made In: China
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood/micarta
Frets: 14
Nut Width: 1.75" (44.5mm)
Scale Length: 24.7" (628mm)
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Sonitone
Controls: Rotary, Volume and Tone
Tuners: Grover Nickel open-geared w/ivoroid knobs
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: As model
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: The Florentine cutaway is a delicate and inventive touch
Cons: Too shiny?
Overall: A solid, mid-range priced, all-rounder guitar. No major surprises here

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality ★★★★☆
Build Quality ★★★★☆
Value for Money ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

www.sigma-guitars.com

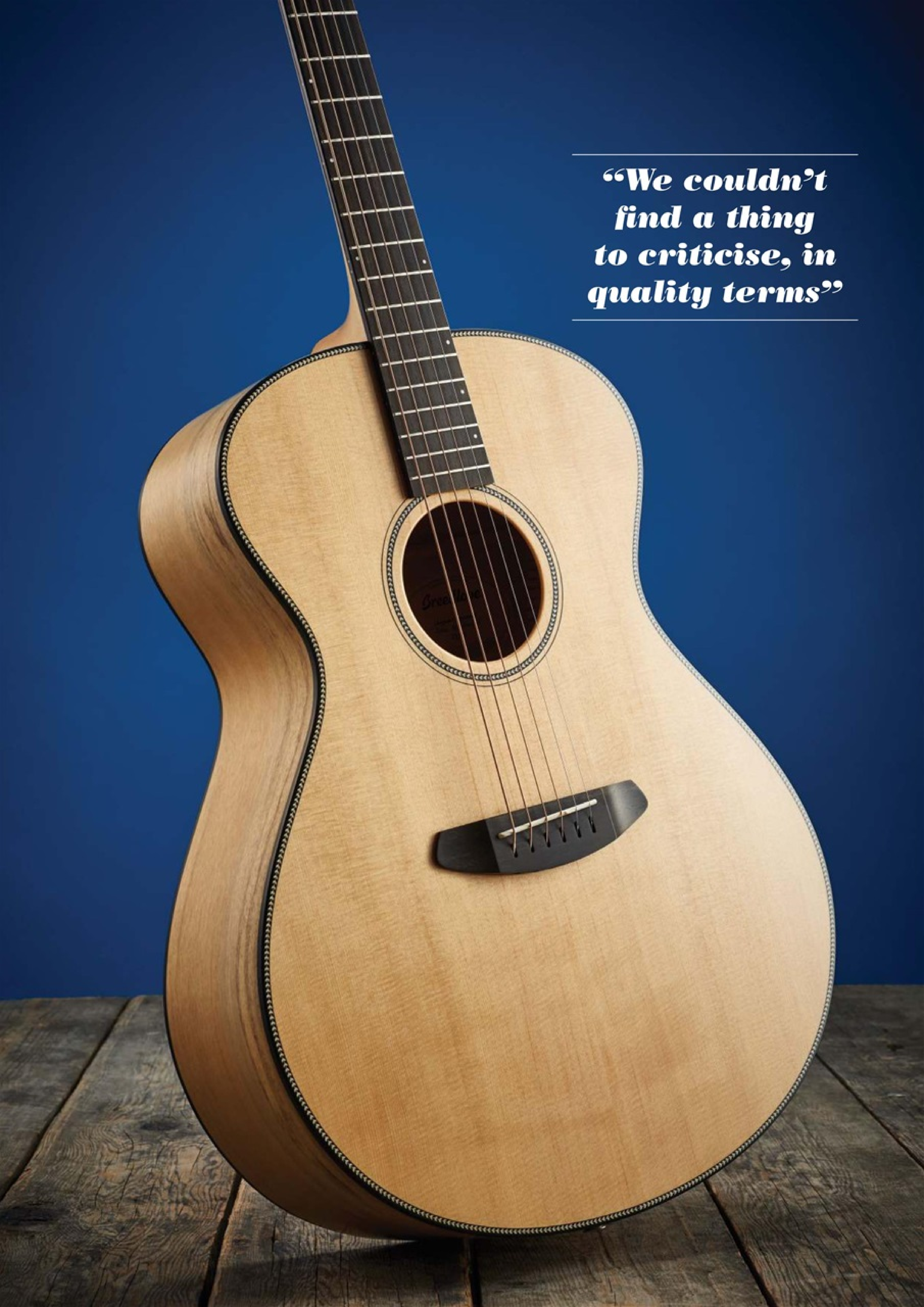
The Fishman Sonitone electronics are discretely placed inside the soundhole. There are two easy-to-use dials – one for volume and one for tone (though it's probably worth noting that the tonal change was very subtle at the volume I was playing it – bedroom level). The amplified sound quality is good, though I do detect a slight muffled translation of the sound through the ACUS amplifier. Whether it is the electronics or the amplifier causing this it is hard to tell. I will admit though that since reviewing the Hughes and Kettner acoustic amplifier my view of acoustic amps has changed quite significantly.

Frustratingly, the guitar doesn't come with a gig bag, though Sigma does offer hard and soft cases on their website, so it'd be worth getting one if you're thinking of purchasing. If you do, Sigma is currently urging artists to send video-links of you and your instrument in performance. The current page on the website showcases a wide variety of singer-songwriters, along with a smattering of ensemble recordings too. It's a positive exercise and some of the recordings are of superb quality – so why not join the fray?

"The resonance at the top end is something I've not heard before"

The Sigma LGMC-SG100F's high quality, unfussy finish and strong tone make it worth the pounds for a mid-range guitar. If you don't want the cutaway, Sigma offer the LGM-SG2+, though visually it's not as exciting and probably wouldn't be worth the motorcycle shot in Sigma's collection brochure.

With only three years to go till Sigma's big 50, you might wonder what they have in store for the future: if they are developing models with dynamic new bracing, ultra light-weight tops, or memory foam necks. Probably not the latter: Sigma have produced a guitar here which is perfect for gigging, playing at home, but probably not for busking. ■



"We couldn't find a thing to criticise, in quality terms"

BREEDLOVE OREGON CONCERTO E

Can a Breedlove which doesn't look like a Breedlove do the business? Sam Wise finds out

Founded in Bend, Oregon in 1990 by Larry Breedlove and Steve Henderson, it has been Steve's brother Kim who has really driven Breedlove forward over the years. Forward looking features, innovative looks, and latterly, a commitment to using Chinese manufacturing to make Breedloves more affordable. The founders both left at the end of the 90s, but Kim, who joined after the formation of the company as a master luthier, remains in that role even as the company is now owned by the Two Old Hippies Guitars group, which also owns Bedell and mandolin specialists Weber. This guitar comes from a series which is moving away from Breedlove's signature visual features into more conventional territory, and it needs to be good to compete without the usual visual differentiators.

BUILD QUALITY

The word Breedlove conjures a particular image in my mind; asymmetric headstock, sharp angular cutaway, lightning bolt bridge. Love them or hate them, they create a clear visual signature that screams Breedlove. This has none of those features, in fact, nothing to distinguish it, at a distance, from the herd of concert body guitars in your local shop! So what do we have in place of the familiar recipe? Well, a new body size for one thing; larger than a concert, not as large as a jumbo, but with the curvaceous shape common to both rather than the more squared off lines of the dreadnought, Breedlove calls it the Concerto. The top is Sitka spruce; a really lustrous piece with so much cross silking that it's actually hard to examine the grain under artificial light. When you manage to do so, it's tight and even, certainly of good enough quality for the price point, and like all Breedloves, it'll be a graduated top, slightly thicker on the treble side to provide brighter highs and more resonant lows. The top is bound in what looks like mahogany, with herringbone purfling mirroring the simple soundhole rosette. Back and sides are solid myrtlewood, an unusual tonewood which Breedlove uses more than any other major builder. This example is pale and handsome, relatively little figuring compared to some of the more dramatic cuts we've seen, but certainly striking.

> **"Little figuring compared to some but certainly striking"**

The bridge is a Breedlove special even if it's not shaped like a lightning bolt; their pinless designs load from the back, with the stated aim of reducing the number of holes in the top and therefore improving resonance. This example is in ebony, with a saddle which looks like real bone, though Breedlove don't specify. In keeping with the general simple appointments of this guitar, the ebony fingerboard has very small offset dot markers (conventional edge markers are in place), has 20 reasonably chunky frets, and a nut that again feels like real bone. The ebony is mounted to a hard rock maple neck finished in a wonderful silk treatment which feels fantastic in the hand. The peghead, cut with a wave motif in the top, is faced in ebony with a simple Breedlove mother of pearl script inlay, and has their own tuners, which seem much like everyone else's, and work perfectly. There's an LR Baggs Element undersaddle pickup too, hooked to the simplest of head units, a volume and tone hidden inside the soundhole, so that the guitar looks all acoustic from the outside. Overall, this is a handsome guitar; the extra size of the Concerto body isn't obvious, the proportions great, and the overall look subtle, understated and classy in a way I don't associate with Breedlove, despite always being a fan. Many of their guitars are now made in China, but this is from the Oregon series, made in Bend, and is executed to perfection. We couldn't find a thing to criticise, in quality terms, and the neck finish is really a bit special.

SOUND QUALITY

The Concerto is big, to put it bluntly; bigger than it looks. Across the room, you could think you were about to get an OM, but this is like a curvy dreadnought; big, wide and deep. It's not too large to wrangle though; it doesn't feel as imposing as, for instance, a Gibson SJ 200, but there's plenty of presence, and you certainly know you're holding a guitar. The neck is a typical modern C profile, and really stands out with the wonderful finish, making it a pleasure to play. The guitar came set up with rather higher action at the bridge than I'd like, but low enough at the nut, so playability is fine until you get up to the dusty end. Intonation is perfect across the board, as it should be at this price.

Opinion on the character of myrtle is divided; some sources put it somewhere between mahogany and rosewood, while Breedlove themselves describe it as being very direct and full of fundamental, rather as maple would be. That's how it sounds here too; there's a brightness to the tone, not so much at the treble end, but in the mids and lows. Plenty of punch, decent volume, but not much harmonic overtone. That doesn't sound appealing but it very much is; it might not be rich, but it is resonant, ringing, with good sustain, and very balanced. Fingerstyle was wonderful on this guitar; the platform of the powerful, responsive bass, subtle when you want it to be, loud when pressed is perfect for the bright, clear, airy top end, and while individual notes might not be dripping in harmonic bloom as they would be in a cedar and mahogany guitar, the overall picture is deeply pleasing. Strumming produces more of the same; punch, projection and clarity, and the harder you push it, the more focused and together it sounds. We simply couldn't get this guitar to muddy up no matter how hard we drove the top.

We found this guitar to be quite the all rounder; fingerstyle rang out bright and clear, strumming has plenty of punch and presence, and flatpicking lines cut through well and grabbed the ear. It's a cracking acoustic tone, and it mostly carries over when plugged in. LR Baggs claim that the design of their pickup avoids quack, but it doesn't altogether. Care must be taken with the plugged-in tone, since the extra punch and pop of the piezo somewhat emphasises what's already there, but with judicious use of the EQ on our amp, we were able to get pretty close to the acoustic tone.

CONCLUSION

This is a really nice guitar; it moves away from Breedlove's modernist roots towards a more traditional look, and does it with aplomb. The understated looks will take Breedlove's appeal to a wider audience, and sonically, it's a little different to the usual wood combinations, with a very useable tone that works for most styles. When you've got £2,979 to put on the table, you have a lot of high quality guitars to try, and for us, the Concerto brings more than enough that's new to the party to be well worth trying. ■

"We couldn't get this guitar to muddy up no matter how hard we drove the top"

BREEDLOVE
OREGON CONCERTO E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Breedlove
Model: Oregon Concerto E
RRP: £2,979
Body Size: Concerto (between concert and jumbo)
Made In: USA
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Solid myrtlewood
Max Rim Depth: 5" (127mm)
Max Body Width: 11.745" (298mm)
Neck: Eastern hard rock maple
Fingerboard: African ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: African ebony
Nut Width: 1.75" (44mm)
Scale Length: 25.5" (648mm)
Weight: 4.5lbs (2.04kg)
Onboard Electrics: LR Baggs Element pickup
Controls: Volume/Tone hidden in soundhole
Tuners: Breedlove closed back
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Natural
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Understated good looks, great tone, unusual tonewoods
Cons: Lack of a tuner might put some off
Overall: A really strong contender

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

www.breedlovemusic.com

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GRETSCH G9500 LTD JIM DANDY

Less than £200 for a bona fide Gretsch? That's just Dandy, says Joel McIver

"Crackerjack quality at a sober price!" burbles Gretsch's website about this super-affordable acoustic. We assume that 'crackerjack' means 'good' rather than Crackerjack the 1970s kids' TV series, but in either case, the idea that this is an easy, exciting product designed for youthful, casual enjoyable entertainment works for us.

This guitar is all about one thing – squeezing as much quality as possible into an instrument that costs a measly £195 – and that's what we bore in mind throughout our test. There are no electronics to bother with, no fancy accoutrements of any kind, and no components that have not been tried and tested on other cheap guitars. Gretsch themselves make it eminently clear in their product description that the G9500 is meant to resemble "everyone's first guitar", and specifically the company's Rex-branded parlour instruments from the 1930s to the 50s. Have they pulled it off? Let's see...

BUILD QUALITY

There are cheap guitars and then there are really cheap guitars, as we all know, and the Gretsch we have here is no £20 knock-off from the local charity shop by any means. You're still paying as much as three tyres for your Volvo here, so you have every right to expect reasonable woods and a decent construction. That's exactly what you get, fortunately, with a slick Vintage White finish – limited edition, apparently, although exactly how limited is not known – an agathis body and a nato neck. Neither of these woods will set records for tone or durability, but they're certainly good enough for the purposes of this guitar.

The G9500 certainly looks the part, designed to be retro to the hilt, 1950s 'Jim Dandy' typeface and all. The single-ply tortoise pickguard features the all-important G graphic for a touch of class, and while the tuners and bridge aren't of noticeably high quality, they look good and function perfectly well. We were impressed by the attention to detail; there were no sharp fret ends, the finish is beautifully applied and the set neck joint appears to be as close to perfect as makes no odds.

> **"There are cheap guitars and there are really cheap guitars – and this is no £20 knock-off"**

The only downside to the physical construction of this dinky instrument is that it's obviously not very strong. Don't expect a feeling of solidity when you pick the guitar out of its case (not supplied; hey, that £195 pricetag comes with sacrifices), because it weighs a mere 1.5 kilos. Don't leave it lying around on the stage at your next gig; even the briefest scuffle with the stage crew's size 11 Doc Martens and you'll be looking for a new guitar.

Mind you, the whole point of affordable gear such as this is that you can replace it, should it happen to be lying on the floor in the gig loading bay when your van reverses in. We're not saying that you wouldn't utter some vivid language if that happened, but at least you wouldn't be witnessing the death of a £3000 Martin or Gibson. Be grateful for small mercies, eh?

SOUND QUALITY

As you'd expect from a small-bodied guitar, which in this case doesn't go deeper than 95mm, the range of tones available is not extreme. If you're after plenty of bass, go elsewhere – although you could easily bolt on a soundhole pickup and run the signal to a preamp for added low-end boost if you had to. However, that's not this instrument's intended purpose; instead, the G9500 delivers clean, clear low and high mids, plus a reasonable amount of top end. Indeed, if you flatpick near

the bridge you can coax a pretty zingy, crispy tone out.

More important than the frequency range for the average amateur is the clarity with which the guitar speaks, and here the Gretsch delivers an obvious win. Honky, hollow, clanky and woody (those technical terms again), the basic sound is pleasant and well articulated. The makers mention this guitar's internal bracing in the company sales fluff, and well they might, because this productive little body punches above its weight when it comes to note clarity.

The available volume level is rather higher than we'd expected, perhaps due to the presence of all those mids. We're not suggesting that you play an unamplified gig with this, unless you're in your living room, that is, but there are more decibels here than anyone would have a right to expect – a sign of

GRETSCH G9500 LTD JIM DANDY

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Gretsch
Model: G9500 LTD Jim Dandy
RRP: £195
Body Size: Parlor
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Agathis
Back and Sides: Agathis
Max Rim Depth: 3.75" (95 mm)
Max Body Width: 13.25"(337mm)
Neck: Nato
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 18 (12 to Body)
Bridge: Rosewood
Nut Width: 1.6875" (42.86 mm)
Scale Length: 24" (610 mm)
Weight: 3.4lbs (1.55kg)
Onboard Electrics: None
Tuners: Open-Gear Die-Cast
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Vintage White
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Tone and volume are impressive
Cons: Inevitably feels a bit boxy and cheap
Overall: A pretty decent way to deliver a Gretsch for under £200

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

Gretsch
www.gretschguitars.com

"The Gretsch G9500 delivers more quality than the cost would normally permit"

good construction and design.

As for the Gretsch's all-round playability? Well, the 24" scale of this petite instrument, more than an inch shorter than many of the most common full-sized acoustic guitars, means several things in practice. Firstly, guitarists with sausage-sized fingers will need to pay a bit more attention than usual, although Gretsch have made it slightly easier for us by building a fingerboard with 12 accessible frets rather than the usual 14. Secondly, the string tension is friendly, without the increased tautness of longer scales; you'll have fun doing blues bends as far down as a low F#, assuming you have reasonable finger strength.

Tuning down is doable to an extent, although drop D or DADGAD are about as extreme as we'd advise you to go. There's just not enough bass for any lower tunings. Where the Gretsch excels is in the upper ranges of the frequency spectrum, and given its small dimensions it's a doddle to achieve a refined, uptuned tone thanks to a capo on the first to third frets. Any higher than that, and you risk transforming the plangent, James Taylor-style twang that we all love into the squeaks of the mice from Bagpuss.

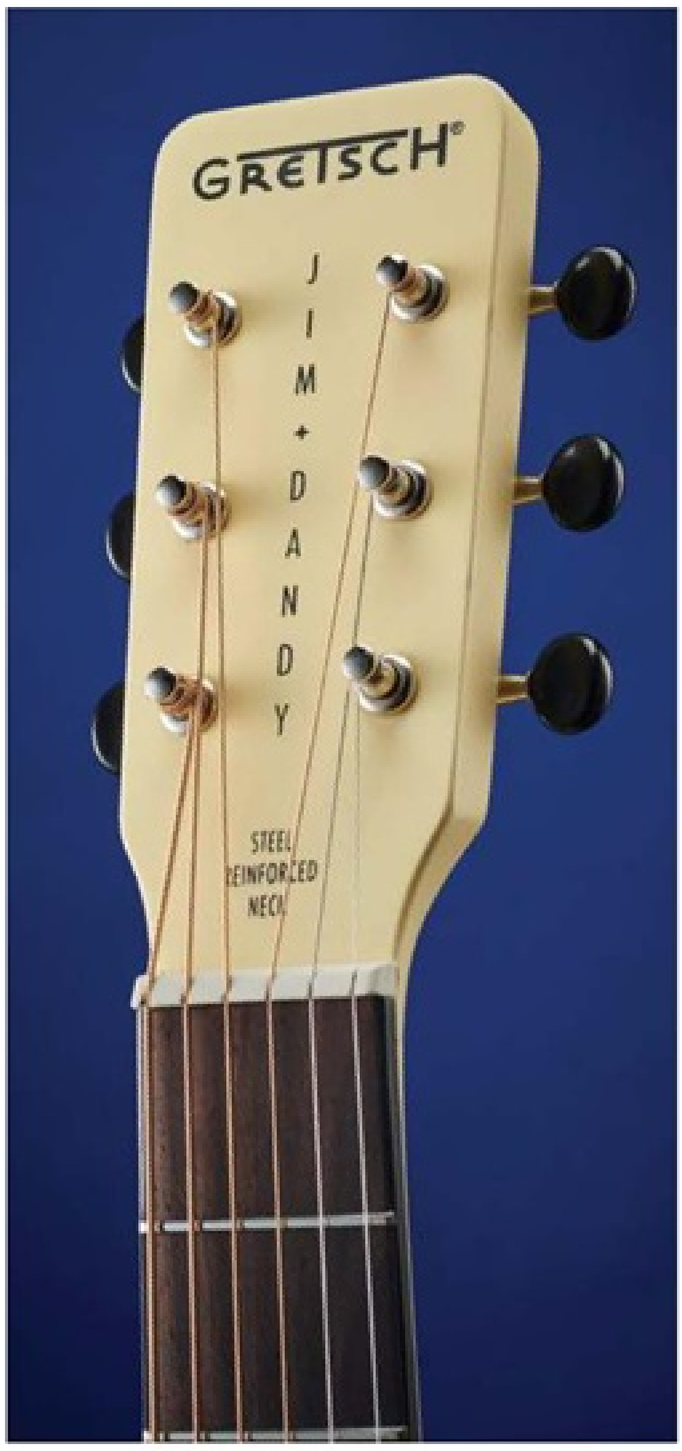
CONCLUSION

With the right performance and useful spec at a ridiculously low price point for a heritage brand, the Gretsch G9500 does indeed pull off the tricky task of delivering more quality than its cost would normally permit. It's not a professional-quality instrument, but it's not far off that point, and its makers are entirely honest about where it fits into today's market.

Take note, though; this is not just another affordable guitar. The G9500 – and other, non-band-breaking instruments like it – is the parlour-sized vanguard of a movement that has been recognised in the electric and bass guitar worlds for some years now. Nowadays, thanks to modern production controls in east Asia, we spoiled Western musicians are able to buy perfectly usable instruments at low prices. It's not like it was in the old days (forgive us a moment of grandfatherly nostalgia) when you paid your money and you took a chance, often ending up with a piece of unplayable junk that barely deserved to call itself a guitar. These days, young players have a fantastic range of options at highly affordable prices.

This is one of the better cheapies we've seen, and we recommend it to anyone who doesn't want, need a high-performing, high-cost, full-sized guitar.

Is it really 'crackerjack' quality? Depends on your point of view, but at this price, we won't be too picky. ■



DR-01s
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BOSS DR-01S

Robbie Gladwell gets his foot tappin' with this portable drum machine designed for acoustic-wielding fly-by-nights

The great thing about an acoustic guitar is that you can make music pretty much anywhere without having to lug around additional equipment. You can't generally say the same about traditional drum kits or percussion, where some form of transport and planning is essential.

Enter the Boss DR-01S... This little device is an electronic drum machine, which is battery powered and has a built-in speaker!

The DR-01S is a radical departure from the usual drum machine in that the drums, percussion and rhythms are instantly accessible from the front panel – without the need for any deep editing – just press the desired buttons and go! Even though it has a built-in speaker it's not unwieldy. It's small enough to place in the accessory pocket in many jumbo guitar cases!

The front panel has visual indication of the instrument types beside each button. This allows you to select any combination of percussion/drums on the fly. If you wish, you can use it solely as a metronome.

There are seven preset buttons which which allow you to toggle the instrument sounds, on or off. Three of the presets have alternative percussion types which can be selected by the variation buttons. The buttons show a bright green light when they are on.

The available instruments are:

1. Shaker/maracas
2. Tambourine/claves
3. Handclap/bongos
4. Congas
5. Cajon
6. Drums
7. Metronome

There is a small LCD screen that displays the various settings, such as tempo, volume, instrument selection and rhythm variation. There is a button labelled 'Beat' that changes time signatures. There are also plus/minus buttons for tempo, volume and program variations. There is a tap tempo button which aids simple time adjustments during performance.

Should you wish to change the volume of a particular instrument, all you need to do is hold that particular button down and make the change with the up/down volume buttons. To switch the DR-01S on there is a button that is inset in the front panel. This prevents accidental switching when transporting or during performance. The display says 'See you' when switching the unit off! Adjacent to this is the 'count-in' button, which does what it says on the tin. The count-in function obviously varies according to the time signature. The default count-in sound is a closed hi-hat. This button glows red to indicate that it is on. It is possible to save up to 50 presets by pressing and holding (for a couple of seconds) the 'Favorite' button (sic). Once you've selected your instruments and tempo you can use the 'Variation' buttons to select the patch number and then press the favourite button again to save. There is a separate exit button, should you wish to escape the edit mode – it's all pretty straightforward really.

Once you've saved your sounds you can recall them by pressing the 'Favorite' button momentarily and then use the 'Variation'

BOSS DR-01S

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Boss
Model: DR-01S
RRP: £229
Made In: China
Width: 210mm
Depth: 143mm
Height: 127mm
Weight: 900g
Speaker: 10cm
Accessories (Sold Separately): Footswitch: FS-5U - Dual Footswitch: FS-6, FS-7
Rated Power Output: 7 watts

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Compact, with a good selection of sounds
Cons: Not quite large enough to provide realistic sounds at higher volume levels (for busking etc)
Overall: This is a brilliant little machine, which is the perfect partner for your acoustic guitar and compact enough to stow away your guitar case (certain full size jumbo cases only)

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ●●●●○
Sound Quality: ●●●●○
Overall: ●●●●○

CONTACT

www.boss.info/uk/products/dr-01s

up/down buttons to make your selection. These buttons light up with an amber colour when used in the 'Selection' mode.

Mounted above the speaker is a larger button that is used for start/stop function. Below this, mounted in the top of the speaker is an LED that flashes to indicate the current tempo. The first beat of the bar flashes red, while the remaining beats flash green. Should you wish it, these colours can be changed in the edit function.

The DR-01S is made from a tough, brown plastic with a light coloured wooden surround. Interestingly, the speaker grille is made from a fine metal mesh, which is much stronger than the cloth varieties, making this a pretty bomb-proof unit.

The front panel and speaker are angled back by around 20 degrees to improve access and the directional sound characteristics. The base of the machine is covered with a 3mm rubber mat to reduce any potential vibration when placing it on a hard surface.

The back panel features a power-in jack so that you can use it with an external power supply (supplied). There is an auxiliary input (3.5mm) so that you can use it with an MP3 player. Should you wish to use the DR-01S through an acoustic amplifier or a PA system there is a line output socket (3.5mm). There is also a standard 6.3mm jack on the back to allow you to control the machine with either a single, or double footswitch. You can control a variety of functions with the foot switches, ranging from stop/start to triggering individual sounds. Below the jack sockets is the battery compartment, which houses six AA batteries for stand alone use.

In use this is the perfect little machine for home use and jamming with your friends. It has a fabulous selection of realistic tones and is very easy to setup and edit. With 50 programmable presets and simple 'on the fly' editing you have the perfect partner for your acoustic guitar. Used in conjunction with an acoustic amplifier or PA system you have the ideal gig rig!

Obviously there are some limitations for its use in certain circumstances, (no deep editing function), but for simple applications it's perfect... ■

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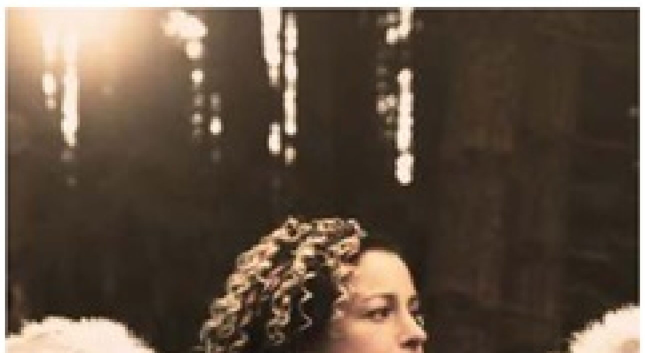

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IN THE WORKSHOP WITH...

CORDOBA VS GUILD

When it comes to acoustic guitars, Cordoba and Guild are two of the most reputable brands out there. As part of a workshop special, Emily Bielby chats to Drew Haines, the senior luthier and finishing manager at Guild Guitars and Andrew Enns, head luthier at Cordoba Guitars to learn the tips and tricks of their craftsmanship success.

Firstly, how did you first fall into the world of luthiery?

Drew: Ever since I was young I have always been fascinated with taking things apart to discover how they work, and creating things via woodworking. About 10 years ago I was looking for a project to fill up my time. I had decided to build an acoustic guitar, purely for the entertainment of saying "I built this." As I looked up more and more about the complexities and intricacies of the acoustic building process, I became more and more enthralled with the prospect of creating instruments.

Andrew: I come from a family of carpenters and engineers, so working with my hands was a common thing since I was little. I had also been a guitar player since I was 10. By my late teens I wanted guitars that I could not afford, until it dawned on me that guitars are made out of wood and I had woodworking experience. I built my first guitar when I was 18 and I've been passionate about it since.

Were you self-taught or did you attend workshops with certain guitar luthiers?

Drew: The core foundation of my knowledge was learned attending Bryan Galloup's school in Michigan. However, I believe that since learning the fundamentals, I have discovered more through personal experience and my own successes and failures. I have also had the pleasure of working with a number of very talented individuals such as Ren Ferguson and many of the individuals who worked in the New Hartford facility. Each and every person has taught me something that I have taken incorporated into my overall knowledge of building.

Andrew: At the beginning I was self-taught; I didn't know anyone who knew anything about guitar building so it was all trial and error. Not until I got into building classical guitars did I have any formal instruction. At that point I learned under Kenny Hill.

Which luthiers did you admire the work of most and look up to when you were starting out your career?

Drew: The two luthiers that have affected me the most in my career have been Bryan Galloup, where I first learned to build, and Ren Ferguson who's been a good friend and was instrumental in opening the new factory in California.

Andrew: When I first started I didn't know anybody who built guitars, so I would say I mostly looked up to Paul Reed Smith because he made the guitars I most admired. Now I admire the work of several builders in many genres of luthiery like Edmund Blöchinger, Ren Ferguson, Michael Greenfield, Tom Ribbecke.

Drew, you're the senior luthier/finishing manager for Guild Guitars, what attracted you to work there?

There is something to be said about working in a production environment. I began working for Guild mainly as a way to expose myself to as much experience as possible. If you want to master a craft, what better way than to repeat the same processes over and over until they become second nature? The factory in New Hartford offered that opportunity to me.

Drew: Did you grow up playing Guild?

I actually never began playing Guilds until I started working at the factory. Since I learned guitar, I have only ever owned a few guitars that I did not physically build myself.

Drew, can you talk me through your role a bit more, and how big is the team you have there for Guild?

Our team currently has around 25 people who all help contribute to building and improving every Guild that leaves our factory. While many improvements to the instruments regarding sound, look and feel are handled by our R&D team and myself, the input and hard work from each and every member of our team help make the build process smoother and more efficient every day. My role is a balance between helping to make design improvements to the actual guitars and working with the team to help train methods that consistently build excellent instruments.

Drew, you obviously build a lot of guitars, from 12-string jumbos to dreadnought or much more smaller bodied acoustics. What's your preferred style of acoustic guitar?

I am personally quite fond of two styles in particular. I love the smaller-bodied concert guitars that comprise our 'M' series. I feel that they give so much for such a small-bodied piece. My other favorite is one that we currently do not build in California. The 'Valencia' or F-47 is my other guitar of choice and is actually the piece that I play at home.

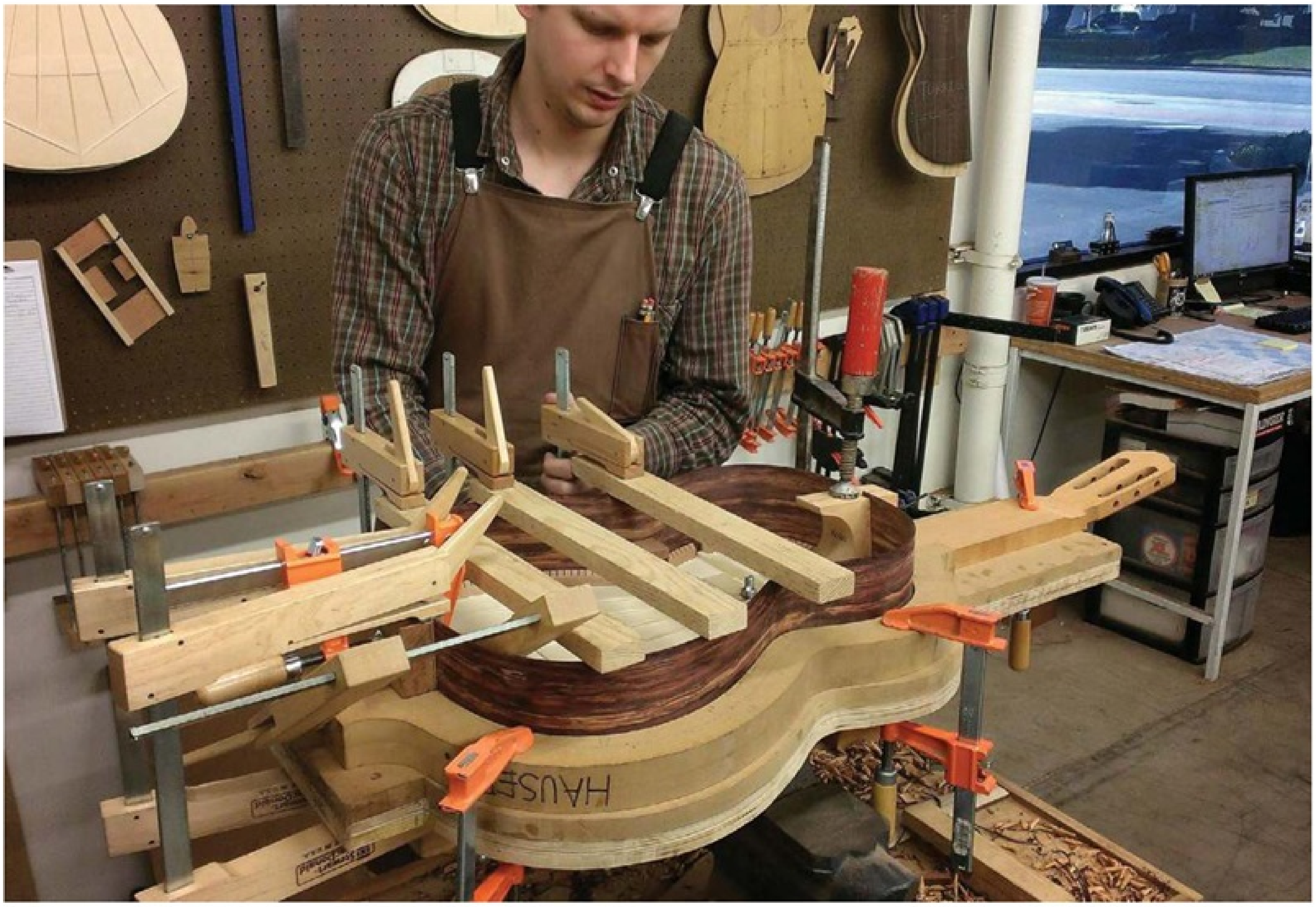
Drew, are there any models that seem to be more popular than others right now?

The D-55 is the iconic Guild and still remains one of our most popular models.

In your own opinion, what makes the ideal acoustic guitar?

Drew: I believe that the ideal acoustic has to have a balance of response, clarity, and balance. You can change the shape and size of a guitar, or change the wood selection and get a different sound but without those three things, the instrument will never quite sing like it should.

Andrew: One that you don't want to put down.



"The ideal acoustic needs response, clarity, and balance"

Tell me about the woods you use. Are there any woods you absolutely cannot work with?
Drew: Guild is founded on 65 years of tradition so many of our woods are the same woods we've always built with. Combinations of mahogany, spruce, maple and rosewood make up most of what we build with. Our higher end lines also utilise ebony for the fretboards and peghead faces. I personally like to build with walnut and koa, but I believe with enough attention and proper building, most species of wood can be made to sound beautiful.
Andrew: I mostly use Engelmann spruce or red cedar for the soundboard, Spanish cedar for the neck, ebony for the fretboard, and Indian rosewood for the back and sides. However back and side woods vary a lot depending on the look or sound I'm going for. There are some woods that I'd say you should not work with and some I don't prefer to use but none that I would say I absolutely cannot work with. Choosing the right pieces of wood is one of, if not the most, important things in building an acoustic guitar. Its rigidity, weight, density, cut, grain, stability, etc all play a part in how it will act and sound.

Andrew, Cordoba are built and designed around the Spanish tradition, what attracted you to build for Cordoba, did you grow up playing Spanish-inspired guitars?
The very first guitar I learned to play was a nylon string. However, after a year or so I got more into electric guitar and didn't get back into Spanish-style guitars until I started working for Cordoba as a quality control tech. As a builder I was always attracted to classical guitars because I thought of it as the epitome of luthiery. I saw the attention to detail and dedication it took to succeed in making a great classical guitar as intimidating and a challenge.

Andrew, your variety of classical, flamenco, orchestral and modern acoustics cater for everyone. Is there a particular model that's popular at the moment?
In the past several years, Cordoba has seen the GK Studio and GK Negra as one of its most popular models. That and probably the C5-CE and the GK Pro.

Andrew, what are your personal Cordoba favourites?
The Hauser and the CE Custom from the Master Series.

Which guitar would you recommend for beginners learning acoustic guitar?
Drew: It's hard to say which guitar is best for beginners since everyone has their own music style that they love. When it comes to American-made Guilds, I recommend starting with either the M-20 or D-20. Both are simple, all-mahogany guitars that have a good weight to them and a great sound.
Guild also has a number of other lines of guitars that are all very affordable and sound wonderful.
Andrew: I recommend the C5. It may be more in the intermediate range but I recommend a guitar that you can grow into more than a guitar you will outgrow.

LUTHIER ON LUTHIER

We let Drew grill Andrew on the questions that matter...

ANDREW ENNS – CORDOBA
Do you play any other instruments besides guitar? No
If you could only have one guitar, what would it be? Any decent six-string acoustic
What make of guitar are you playing right now? Enns Guitars
Favorite band/artist? Thrice
What's your favourite film soundtrack? *O' Brother Where Art Thou*
What's your favorite film? *Shawshank Redemption*
How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? A woodchuck could chuck all the wood a woodchuck could if a woodchuck could chuck wood.
Metallica or Megadeth? Metallica
Do you have favorite guitar player? If so who? Randy Rhodes

> **"With enough attention and proper building, most woods can sound beautiful"**

Drew: What are your favourite of the Guild models?
The M-40 Troubadour and the F-47CE are my two current favorites. The D-40 Traditional is a close third.

Drew, which guitar would you recommend to anyone wanting to learn some basic blues?
I believe that mahogany guitars give the best blues sound. Our D-40 Traditional takes a lot of its inspiration from the old Richie Havens D-40BG. We also build the D-20, which boasts an all-mahogany body that really helps give that rich sound that blues players often look for.
Andrew: Same as before, I'd recommend the C5 to start.

What was your first guitar? And do you still own it?
Drew: My first guitar was a 1960s Sekova nylon-string guitar that we always had in the house when I grew up; I don't have that particular guitar anymore.
Andrew: It was a classical guitar borrowed from my cousin. I have no idea who made it, and no I don't have it anymore.

What acoustics do you have in your own personal collections?
Drew: The majority I have are personal builds. Others include a Guild F-47CE, a few Les Paul electrics and an old Seagull 12-string.
Andrew: Well, the only acoustic in my collection that I didn't build is a Yamaha CPX steel-string.

How do you feel about vintage acoustics and do you own any?
Drew: I love looking at vintage pieces to see the many different ways that guitars have been constructed over the years. Depending on the age of the instrument, there are many things we can learn about what makes a piece

stand the test of time. That being said, I do not personally own any truly vintage pieces. I strive to learn from the past and create new instruments that will stand the test of time just as well as the vintage ones do now.

Andrew: I don't own any vintage acoustic guitars. But I love vintage acoustic guitars; the sound of a good acoustic guitar only gets better with age. Many of today's guitar builders are simply trying to recreate the magic of certain vintage instruments they have played or own.

Andrew, you're Cordoba's head luthier, what does your role entail; do you oversee a team? I can't imagine it being a one-man job?

My primary role is building the Cordoba Master Series and Custom Shop guitars along with one other builder. We each build a single guitar from start to finish, so each Master Series guitar is built by one builder from beginning to end. I also design and build prototypes for new models, assist our service department and quality control with training, repairs and customer inquiries.

What sets a Cordoba or Guild acoustic apart from other brands?

Drew: I believe that Guild has a heritage of excellence that has continued throughout the years. In the last 30 years, the brand has moved around four times to different factories and each time, it has improved its sound and quality. This latest move is no different. The acquisition of Guild by Cordoba Music Group has helped bring new life and fresh talents to this brand. There is so much enthusiasm behind its rebirth. I believe that everyone will continue to see great things coming out of our company.

Andrew: Cordoba has the biggest and best selection of nylon-string guitars of any brand in the world. From our entry-level guitars to advanced models, you will get exceptional value for a low cost.

What guitars are you both working on at the present moment?

Drew: Currently we are focused on re-releasing the jumbo models and the 12-string guitars everyone has been so patiently waiting for.

Andrew: I just finished the Cordoba 20th anniversary guitar, a prototype stage guitar, and I'm always working on a couple Master Series guitars. I have a CE Custom mid-assembly right now.

Drew, I see that the American Classic is a new model. What were the concepts behind it?

When it comes to tradition, it's hard to make too many changes. Every time we relaunch a pre-existing model, we want to do justice to everything that made that model great to begin with. That being said, we have the ability to look back at what didn't work so well with those particular pieces. Part of our mindset on re-releasing older models is framed around taking everything that made people fall in love with those guitars to begin with, and building that into the new model. At the same time, we want to look at the areas that could be improved. Can we lighten up the guitar? How about making it louder or more responsive? Can the piece be better balanced? All of these questions help us to decide what to change and what to keep the same. A Guild guitar like the D-55 has a feel to it that makes it unique. We never want to change that but through changes and improvements under the hood, we can maintain the iconic look of Guild while giving musicians a much better instrument that they will love.

Andrew, to celebrate 20 years of Cordoba guitars, you've recently been working on the 20th anniversary model and mentioned that the mosque in Cordoba, Spain, inspired it. Can you tell me more about that?

The idea was to combine a bit of the company's past, where we are now, and maybe a glimpse of where we are going in the future. The look was greatly inspired by the intricate detail and architecture of the mosque in Cordoba, Spain. I can't say the sound was inspired by anything specific other than the traditional "Spanish" guitar sound. What we got was exactly that, a very big, dynamic sound with deep lows and piano-like highs. Each note is punchy and resonant with a bit of "air" around it. When played soft it can be sweet and airy, and has plenty of headroom to dig deep for big aggressive tones. ■

L-R: Andrew Enns of Cordoba and Drew Haines of Guild

LUTHIER ON LUTHIER

...And then it was Andrew's turn to pose the questions...

DREW HAINES –GUILD

What is your favorite band? Pink Floyd

Do you have any siblings? One brother

Do they play any instruments? No

What was the first instrument you learned to play? Piano

Did you play any instruments in school growing up? French horn and keyboard

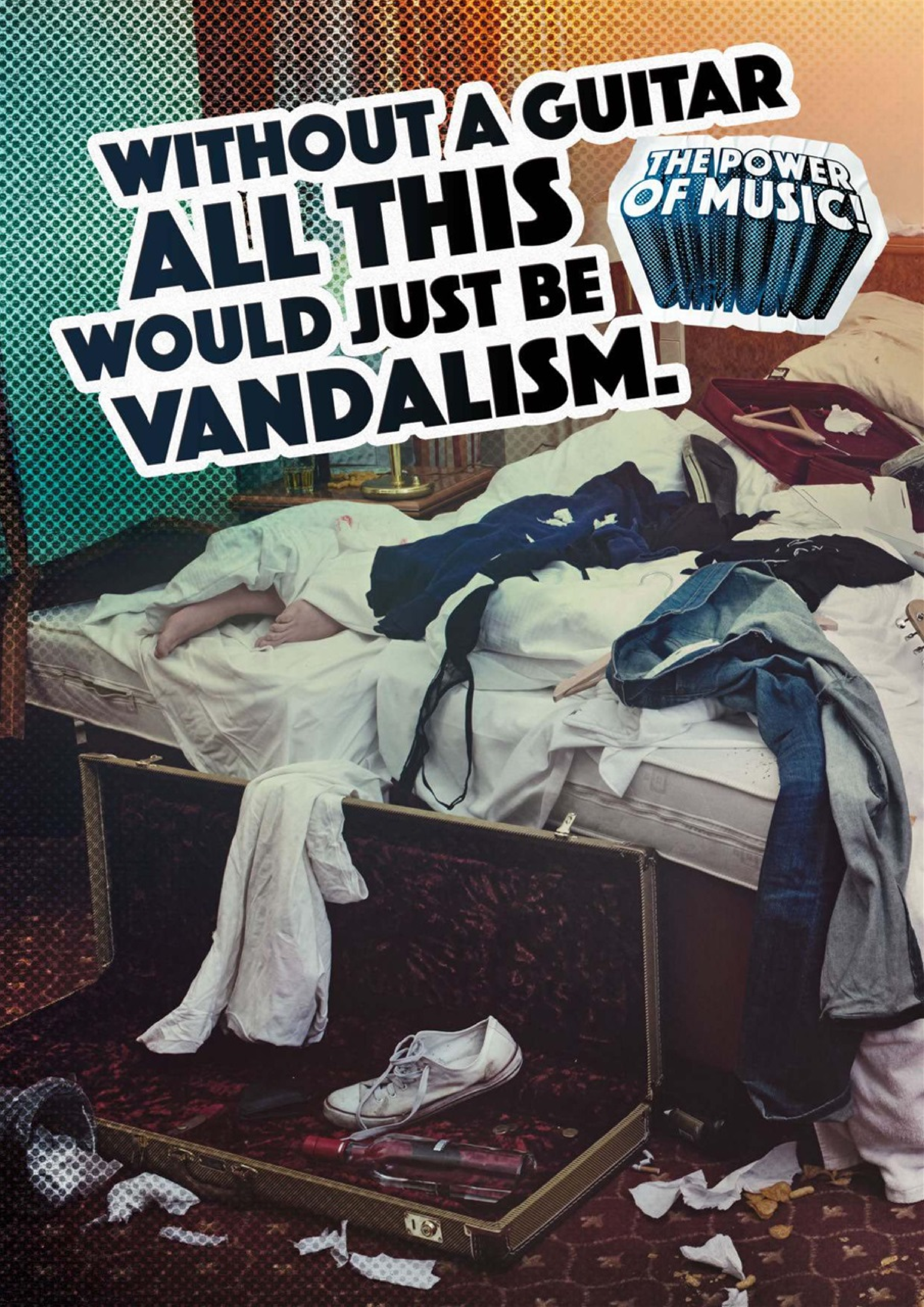
What make of guitar are you playing now? Guild F47CE Blonde

Which style of guitar do you prefer -- electric or acoustic? Acoustic

How many guitars do you currently own? 13

What was your first 'go-to' music store? Daddy's Junky Music in New Britain CT

Why guitars? People give you strange looks when you carry around a grand piano. Also they are just plain fun to play.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THINKING **INSIDE** THE BOX

Luthier to the stars Nick Benjamin begins a series on pickups: this month, tackles their acoustic-specific history and how they emerged

WORDS: NICK BENJAMIN

Electric, classical and acoustic guitars are to me, with my background as a player, all one-and-the-same. So rather than being horrified at the thought of electrifying my acoustic creations, I embrace the challenge of trying to get an amplified tone that I'm happy with, just as I would with the challenge of getting the right acoustic tone.

Acoustic guitar pickups have come a very long way in the past 20 or so years since I first started to experiment with them. But most of the main types have been around for a long time and improvements have often come through evolved design rather than new technologies. I will go through the pros and cons of the main types next time but first, a history lesson...

WHAT, WHY, HOW?

So what is a pickup? A 'pickup' is a type of transducer – something that turns energy of one form into another. The role of a pickup in guitar amplification is to turn acoustic vibration into an electrical signal. The electrical signal can then be used to create sound again (usually after amplification or processing) via another transducer that acts in the opposite direction, converting an electrical signal to sound: usually known as a loudspeaker, of course.

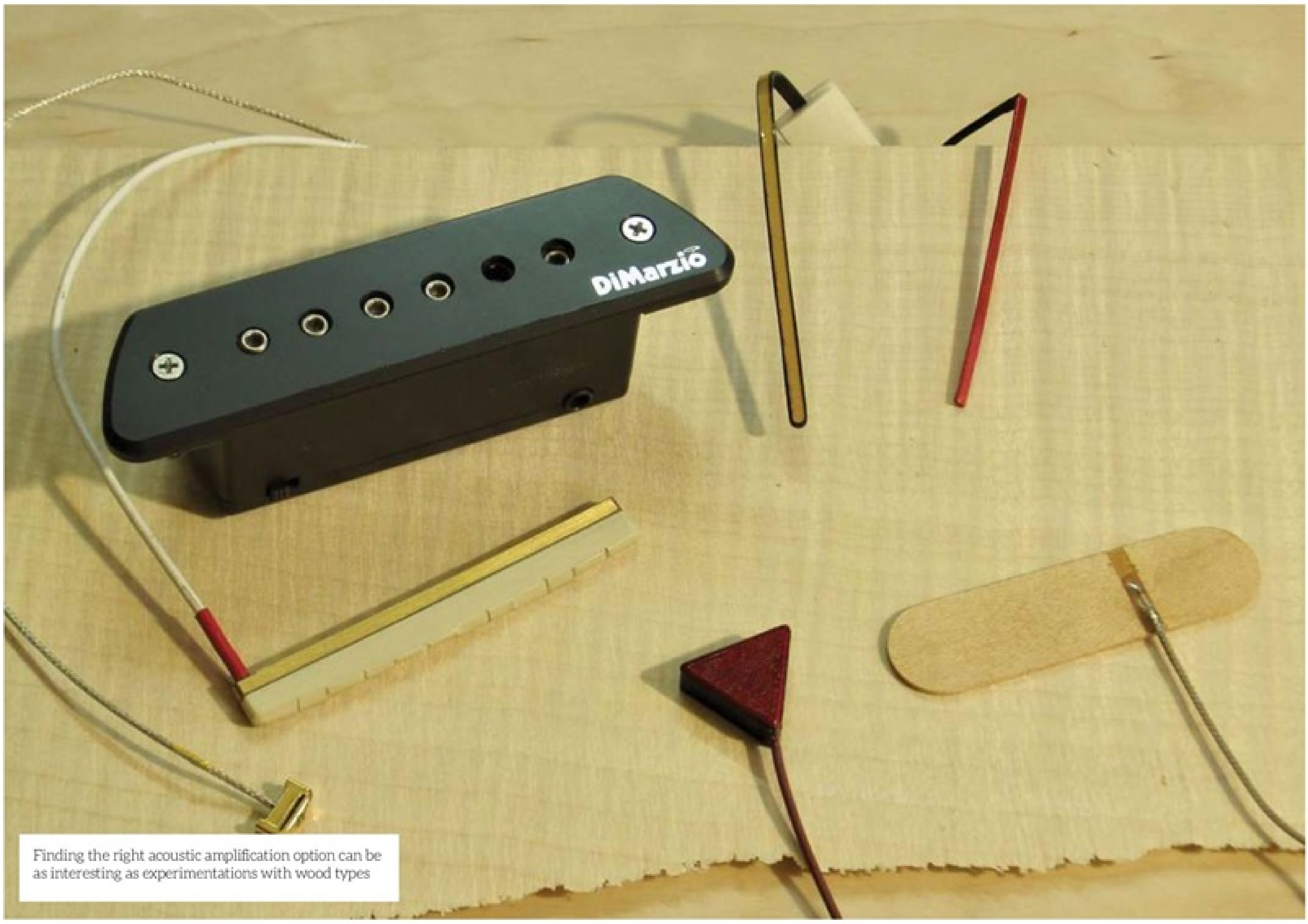
This may come directly through a PA system for live performance to a larger number of people than an unamplified acoustic guitar could easily be heard by, or via a recording process to reach millions (potentially). In fact, we can actually use a loudspeaker in reverse as a pickup: it's usually designed somewhat differently and known as a dynamic microphone. Indeed, the earliest type of transducer used to capture guitars' sound electrically was in fact a microphone. But what makes a pickup different to a microphone is that it is attached to the instrument and generally does not receive vibration through the air from the guitar but actually receives it by either being in direct contact with a vibrating part of the guitar or via the motion of metal strings using electromagnetics.

FROM MICS TO PICKUPS

So why have microphones been replaced by pickups for many guitar-using performers playing to larger audiences? The guitar is a relatively quiet instrument and varying sound comes from quite a wide area of its body. If we have a much louder instrument like a violin or a sound that comes from a very localised point like the human mouth then we are much less likely to get acoustic feedback than if we need to really turn up the mic for the relatively quiet acoustic guitar. Using a stationary mic also requires that the guitar player keeps his instrument in exactly the right place relative to the mic to maintain a steady volume and tone. Not much chance for 'physical expression' there then! One solution that has remained to this day is to attach a mic to your guitar so that relative positioning remains constant but mics were generally bulky in the early days. That didn't stop Les Paul attaching a mic to his guitar for singing though!

ELECTROMAGNETIC PERSONALITY

The first experiments by players such as Les Paul to overcome the problems with microphones and guitars often involved using other transducers – originally designed for different tasks to get rid of the feedback sensitive air gap and receive sound directly from the guitar. Phono-cartridges that usually capture vibration from a record's surface were frequently commandeered from the gramophone: often alongside the family radio amplifier and speaker in lieu of a guitar amp! Many of these devices worked on an electromagnetic principle, just like a loudspeaker in reverse, or a dynamic mic,



Finding the right acoustic amplification option can be as interesting as experimentations with wood types

where a magnet, a coil of fine wire and vibrating iron come together to produce an electric voltage in the coil that can be amplified. It was quickly found that using the vibrating steel based strings next to a permanent magnet and a coil of fine copper wire was a great way to get a strong feedback resistant version of a guitar's sound, as long as the guitar had steel strings!

KEEPING IT NATURAL: PIEZO PICKUPS

This initial experimentation, of course, led to getting rid of the other main feedback inducing element: the hollow body of an acoustic guitar and produced the solid electric guitar! But the new electric guitar was so different to the guitars that started the journey that many people kept on with the quest to amplify the acoustic in some sort of more 'natural' sounding manner. Another type of transducer quickly became popular that used a different effect than the electromagnetic ones: the 'piezo' transducer.

The hollow body feedback dilemma drove pioneers like Les Paul

"AS FASHIONS CHANGE, SOME COMPANIES ARE EVEN GOING BACK TO ELECTROMAGNETIC DEVICES"

The piezo-electric effect is such that deforming a certain type of material produces a voltage. This material was initially usually a solid crystal but now can come as a thin flexible film and if we apply a varying force (a vibration) to some we can measure a varying voltage and amplify it. The voltage produced by most piezo-electric materials is relatively low but as electronics became smaller, fitting miniature preamplifiers very close to the pickups became much easier.

The modern 'active' piezo based systems we are all so used to now became very common – with the added advantages of volume and EQ controls soon becoming part of many onboard preamps.

So we have two main technologies to pick up sound directly from our guitar; piezo and electromagnetic plus microphones that have an intermediate connection via vibrating air and are now frequently used in combination with the first two technologies for more complex systems. Pickups that use varying capacitance like a condenser mic are also available but are uncommon as they require a very specialised material. The positioning of these devices makes a big difference to the tone we end up with. As fashions change and new products emerge, we see many options available with some companies even going back to electromagnetic devices similar to the original gramophone phono-cartridges (albeit starting from scratch with modern ideas in the search for better tone.)

Next time: we discuss the wide range of pickups available in this day and age! ■

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ALICE HOWE

STYLE... FOLK

Based in Boston, Massachusetts, I'm 26 years old, and I've been singing and playing guitar since childhood. In 2016, I began pursuing music professionally, and since then I've produced an EP, *You've Been Away So Long*, and touring to promote it. I wrote all the songs while living in Seattle, and they offer a window into that period in my life, capturing a sense of adventure and a longing for home. My favourite track is 'Nothing But You', which honours and celebrates my father, who passed away when I was 18. I love it because the lyrics always ring true for me. I often write with my guitar in hand, improvising with words and melodies until something sticks. I play a Martin Custom Shop acoustic. It's similar to the OM-21, but with an Engelmann spruce top, a cutaway, and minimal inlay. I adore the size, the clean look, and the clear, powerful tone. I pride myself in my steady right hand, and I do a lot of fingerpicking, but I'll use a pick to strum. On occasion I play in DADGAD, and lately I've been getting into the partial capo, which frets the A, D, and G strings in standard tuning and opens up a lot of beautiful voicings. I use a K&K Pure Mini pickup, and pair it with the Red-Eye Twin DI from Fire-Eye. The two sound fantastic together, and work in just about any setting. At smaller gigs such as house concerts, I use my Fishman Loudbox Artist acoustic amplifier for a bit of sound reinforcement. It's great because it accommodates both my guitar and Shure SM58 vocal microphone. Right now I'm excited to be working on my first full-length album and looking forward to coming to the UK for the first time in autumn 2018.

www.alicehowe.com

SAM BROTHERS

STYLE...FOLK

The most important thing I've learnt as a musician is to pay close attention to things – I've always felt that it's much more important to listen to others play rather than play myself. I'm a 24-year-old folk singer and guitarist living in Canterbury, and I've just released my debut album, *Farewell To My Old Days*. Its theme is the human condition and some of the things we're confronted with in our lives. The title track is about moving on from a relationship without making the other person feel bad – even breakups can be done in a spirit of love and understanding. The album was recorded live onto 2" tape, which gives the sound a nice warmth. The producer, Mark St John, only ever records onto tape – a rarity nowadays, but definitely worth it for this kind of music. I play a 1964 Levin LS-18 Goliath. It's a steel string dreadnought with a spruce top and a wide neck. It's nicely balanced across the strings, has a rounded low end and looks fantastic too. I mainly play fingerstyle, but sometimes use a flat pick. I like to use open tunings – open G, open D, drop D, open Dm, plus DADGAD and some variants. I also play a lot in standard tuning. I prefer to play completely acoustic where possible, but with a PA I use a LR Baggs M1A pickup, LR Baggs Para DI and a Biyang Tonefancier EQ pedal. I also play harmonica – a load of Hohner Big River harps and a Hohner FlexRack. The FlexRack is a seriously good bit of kit, meaning you can do a bit more with the harmonica. Future plans? At the moment it's all about getting the music out there, with lots of live performances around the UK – see my Facebook page for dates.

www.facebook.com/sambrothersmusic

TERRA LIGHTFOOT

STYLE… ROCK/BLUES

Based in Hamilton, Ontario, my music rides the lines between soul, rock, blues, and folk. I'm known for playing electric guitar – a 1972 Gibson SG through a 1962 blonde Fender Bassman – but recently started playing acoustic after local luthier Ashley Leanne approached me about making a custom guitar to take on the road. I never dreamed somebody would want to build a guitar for me, and the fact that she's a woman is even cooler. It's an Ashley Leanne Songwriter model, and she let me select everything with her guidance. We went for a smaller jumbo shape, bubinga back and sides, spruce top, mother of pearl inlays and purpleheart around the sound hole. She even carved an inlay of one of my tattoos as a surprise. This guitar has such incredible mid-range that when you give it a little bit of a shake and let the chords ring, it creates its own effects. It's the greatest sounding acoustic I've ever written on. My latest album, *New Mistakes*, is about acknowledging your mistakes, taking stock of where you've been, and trying to go down a different road, have new experiences and pursue new mistakes and hence new successes. My favourite track? 'Ruthless' or maybe 'Drifter'. Both of those songs still really gut me when I sing them. I identify so strongly with the characters and I think the sounds came through how I wanted them to after the band and the producer came into the fold. We worked hard together, and this is as much their record as it is mine. We're currently putting on a big album release show in Hamilton because we haven't been able to play our hometown since the album came out, then we're heading to Australia and the US, returning to the UK in May or June 2018.

www.terralightfoot.com

MATTHEW ORD

STYLE… FOLK

I'm a 37-year-old folk musician, based in Newcastle upon Tyne. My band, Assembly Lane, comprises myself (guitar and lead vocals), Niles Krieger (fiddle), Tom Kimber (mandolin) and Bevan Morris (double bass). We play British and American traditional music – basically a mix of bluegrass and British ballads – along with original compositions by Tom. Our debut album, *Northbound*, has been some time in gestation, and for me it's about exploring our musical common ground. The striking thing is how unified it sounds, despite the range of material. The title track, which Tom wrote, is my favourite. There's a little moment in the mandolin solo where you can hear so many musical strands coming together. It encapsulates the whole record and is a stand out moment for me. I'm an arranger rather than a songwriter. Transforming the bare outline of a tune into a complex and finished piece of music, especially when done collaboratively, is extremely satisfying. The sound of a guitar can shape your ideas, as can tunings. The main tuning I use with the band is standard, but I also have been known to use CGDGAD, CGDGCD, DADGAD and DGDGAD for fingerstyle. I tend to use a pick for the US repertoire and fingerstyle for British. I often start an arrangement by learning the melody and trying to reflect the shape of the narrative in my guitar part. I use a Recording King RD-316 acoustic dreadnought for strumming and flatpicking, and a 1967 Martin 00-18, a quiet, small-bodied guitar for fingerstyle. I have a K&K Pure Mini transducer in the dreadnought, which sounds pretty good straight into the PA, and an LR Baggs acoustic guitar DI/preamp for the Martin. We're currently working on new material and getting ready to tour the album around the UK during 2018 – check the website for details.

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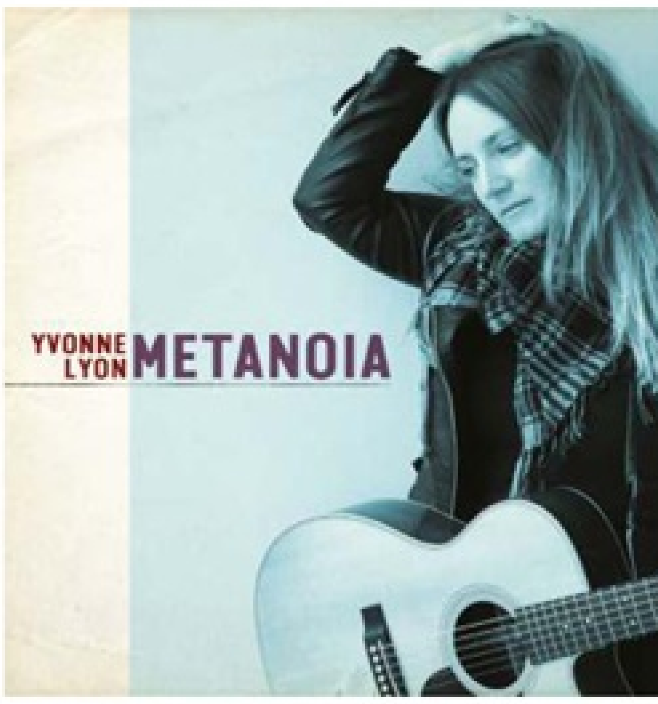

YVONNE LYON

METANOIA ★★★☆☆

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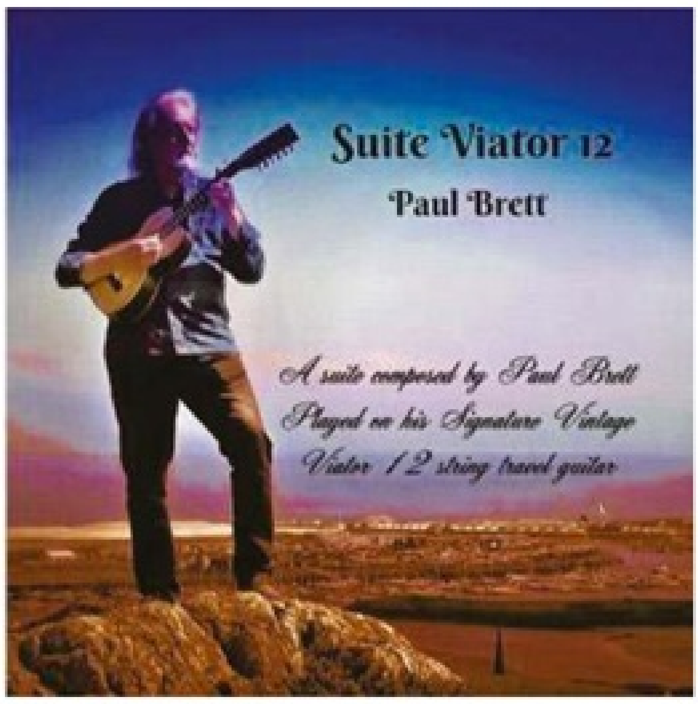
Although it sounds like something you wouldn't want to catch, Metanoia is apparently a Greek noun meaning 'a new way of seeing', the inspiration for this eighth release from this fine Scottish singer. Although the arrangements fuse Americana and folk influences, with the occasional ambient dalliances, it's music that's impossible to categorise. The only common denominator lies in the heartfelt honesty Yvonne brings to songs of gentle melancholy like the anthemic 'Sweetest Freedom' or the dreamy 'She Survived The Winter'. The intensely intimate feel of the material could be intimidating, but there's an underlying sense of vulnerability that's intensely engaging. **JP**

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

LIVE AT C - BOYS ★★★★☆

WWW.JIMMIEVAUGHAN.COM

This one has been on the cards for a while. Recorded live at a downtown Austin Texas club, hunkered down with Mike Flanigin on Hammond B3, Frosty Smith on drums and a lot of soul, the master of understated blues guitar works his way through an intriguing clutch of tracks including a stomping version of 'You Can't Sit Down', a mournful 'St. James Infirmary' and Lionel Hampton's 'Frame For The Blues'. As ever Jimmie is happy to sit on the sidelines, and it's the cathedral roar of Flanigin's wondrous B3 that often steals the show. But as an object lesson in the mantra that less is always more, you won't hear anything finer; a real treat. **JP**



PAUL BRETT

SUITE VIATOR 12 ★★★★☆

WWW.PAULBRETTGUITARIST.CO.UK

A man who's no stranger to our readers, Paul shows his mastery of the 12-string on this self penned suite, all performed on his self designed Viator Travel 12. Given the presumed physical limitations of this 'mini' parlour instrument, you'd expect the tonal variations to be on the restricted side, but far from it. There's an unexpected deep resonance to the lilting 'Twixt Mountains And Sea', a wonderfully nimble piece that weaves a line between Celtic and classical influences, and on 'Changing Skies', it's easy to believe you're listening to a Spinet. An album that barely pauses to draw breath, Paul's imaginative approach to the 12-string is a revelation. **JP**

SULTANS OF STRING

CHRISTMAS CARAVAN ★★★☆☆

WWW.SULTANSOFSTRING.COM

Festooned in Xmas garb on their cover, is this another dire yuletide workout ? Forget it. This bunch of 'world jazz flamenco' artists have scoured the globe for contributors, resulting in a mindboggling set of tunes. Too many highlights to single out, but after the murky start with 'Turkish Greensleeves' performed by a Turkish Roma string ensemble, the mood quickly bounces into overdrive with Richard Bona's 'Sing For Kwanzaa', a breeze of African Highlife. There's soul-drenched gospel from Sweet Honey In The Rock, the Chieftains 'Paddy Moloney tugs the heartstrings with his whistle on 'Niel Gow's Lament', and peerless gypsy jazz from Nikki Yanofsky. Who needs Slade? **JP**

RALPH MCTELL AND WHIZZ JONES

ABOUT TIME TOO ★★★★☆

WWW.RALPHMCTELL.COM

Lately Ralph and Whizz have been out there touring like they'd just learnt to drive. This is their second joint album, and as you'd expect from this pair of UK folk veterans, the songs – some learned from their early busking days and others gleaned from their respective musical highways – roll out with just the kind of consummate ease you'd expect. There's nothing particularly new, but hearing Ralph singing 'Long Black Veil' or Whizz's rendition of Paul Siebel's 'Louise', is strangely reassuring. Almost the last men standing from the fertile 60s folk uprising, long may they reign. **JP**

ARCELIA

BUILDING ON THE LAND ★★☆☆☆

WWW.ARCELIA.CO.UK

'I'm finding peace in soothing tones of familiar voices', Gavin Alexander sings on 'Yellow Soup', an oddly appropriate line for the band's apparent mindset. For with three voices, a brushed cajon and guitar, with their gentle harmonies and light airy songs, this Kent trio owe much to transatlantic influences, CSN&Y being obvious counterparts. They've a batch of cleverly crafted songs and the album's production is impressive, but it's the kind of easy listening acoustic music that too easily rolls by, mainly without causing a stir. And when it does occur with Teresa Gallagher singing 'Into The Dark', as she does with convincing languorous yearning, it's a welcome diversion. **JP**

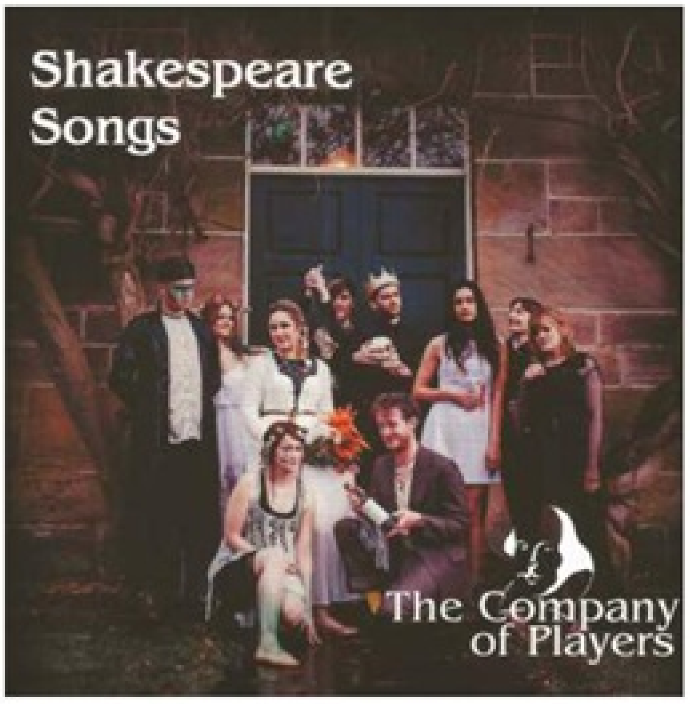
WILLIE AND THE BOYS

WILLIE'S STASH VOL. 2 ★★★☆☆

WWW.WILLIENELSON.COM

The passing of the years – the old desperado's 84 now – have done nothing to dim Willie Nelson's appetite for laying down good ole honky tonking music, and with sons Lukas and Micah on board – both now respected artists in their own right – this is very much a family affair.

The material draws heavily from the Hank Williams songbook, but there's a tremendous live feel to the proceedings, Willie breathing oxygen into classics like the rocking 'Move It On Over' and the sleepy pulse of 'Your Cheating Heart', no easy task. Let's hope his boys always keep this particular flame burning bright. **JP**



THE COMPANY OF PLAYERS

SHAKESPEARE SONGS ★★★☆☆

WWW.TWITTER.COM/SHAKESPEAREFOLK

'Double double, toil and trouble'. Sound familiar? As ambitious projects go, this one takes a lot of beating. Assembled to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of the bard, this 10-strong folk outfit romp through 10 self-penned songs using Shakespeare's writings as a jumping off point. It's a brave venture and a tribute to the band and producer Sam Kelly that the results are both affecting and totally original. Highpoints in this unusual melting pot include the gothically-charged 'Black Spirits' and the frenetic knees-up 'Method In The Madness', moments in an album of bewildering complexity that's hard not to like – even if you hate Shakespeare. **JP**

JIM KWESKIN

UNJUGGED ★★★★☆

WWW.JIMKWESKIN.COM

The latest in a series of unlikely American troubadours unearthed by the Hornbeam record company, Jim Kweskin is one of the last performing survivors of the Greenwich Village folk scene; his 60s Jugband hailed as innovators and his influence on the nascent folk scene second only to Dylan. Strange but true. But far from being some creaking relic, from the first bars of 'Days Of '49', Jim's vocals are on remarkable form, singing with staggering power and clarity. The songs are Jim's road-hewn set honed over decades, everything from the risqué 'Mermaid Song', to the tragic tale of the 'Wreck Of The Old 97'. A priceless musical time capsule. **JP**

TURNPIKE TROUBADOURS

A LONG WAY FROM YOUR HEART ★★★★☆

WWW.TURNPIKETROUBADOURS.COM

Oklahoma's Turnpike Troubadours cheerfully admit Merle Haggard wouldn't call them country, but does it matter? The States are awash with young country outfits, but this album is certainly louder than any string band has a right to be. And with the taxing tales of the recurring characters that crop up on their albums, and the kick ass neo rock arrangements, this band have more in common with a band like the Drive By Truckers. Evan Felker's songs about a man watching his house burn down, or the magic of love under Oklahoma stars create the same red dirt resonance, dry observational depths of humanity that are hugely entertaining if occasionally tragic. **JP**

BELLA HARDY

HEY SAMMY ★★★★★

WWW.BELLAHARDY.COM

'I still don't know what I want to be,' Hardy sings on 'Learning To Let Go', a charming piece of folky pop that's track two on what, incredibly, is her ninth solo album. And in a way the song could be a signature for her own career. Since she first blew into view at the Sidmouth Folk Festival at the tender age of 13, her career has followed some unorthodox routes – stints in China and Nashville – to arrive at her most commercial album to date. Gifted with a wondrous floating voice, Bella turns her attentions to the rise of racism on the title track, and elsewhere pulls off meaty songs rooted in humanist hymns, and feminist battle cries. A coming of age for a huge talent. **JP**

TOM FELDMANN

DYED IN THE WOOL ★★★★★

WWW.TOMFELDMANN.COM

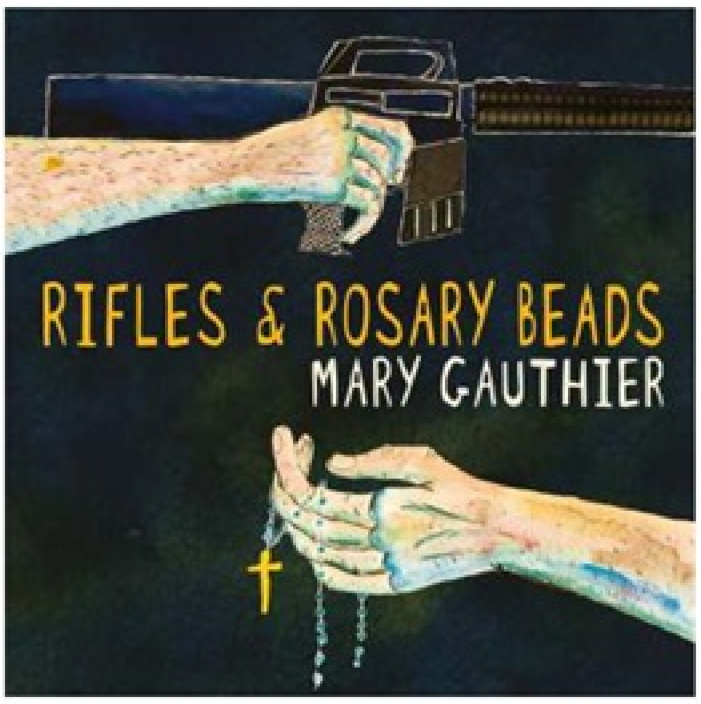
One of those stay-at-home talents, over the years Minneapolis based Tom Feldmann has produced acclaimed instructional DVDs – notably one on Robert Johnson – and been a regular teacher at Stateside guitar camps. Throughout he's lurked under the radar. But now with the 10 self-penned songs on show here, although his blues roots are an omnipresent basis for much of what he plays, Tom proves that he's not just some hoary revisionist. His instrumental 'Potato Soup' owes much to the lyrical inventiveness of John Fahey, his deft slide playing on 'Going Now But I Won't Stay Long', the kind of licks you might have heard Furry Lewis playing on Beale Street. Fine stuff. **JP**

GRANT LEE PHILLIPS

WIDDERSHINS ★★★★★

WWW.GRANTLEEPHILLIPS.COM

'I've made a commitment to myself not to sink into despair' explains the former frontman of Grant Lee Buffalo. And if this latest album comes from a sense of doom, it's not apparent. Recorded in Nashville, in a simple trio format, there's a jaunty feel to songs like the acoustic-led 'King Of Catastrophes' and 'Miss Betsy'. Admittedly what he's singing about on 'Another, Another, Then Boom' sounds ominous, but with cleverly crafting like this, the subject material is secondary. Essentially one of those American singer/songwriter albums that cranks along with admirable gusto, driven by chiming guitars and soulful sub Springsteen vocals, what's not to like? **JP**



MARY GAUTHIER

RIFLES & ROSARY BEADS ★★★★★

WWW.MARYGAUTHIER.COM

Never one to shirk sticking her head above the parapet, this time around Mary Gauthier has chosen to expose the weighty problems faced by returning US veterans and their spouses, songs co-written with the veterans themselves. This is not easy material to hear but also impossible to ignore. On 'Still On The Ride' she sings of the guardian angel who decides 'who should die and who should carry on', the title song a gentle acoustic tale of conflicting issues. Somehow with her wonderfully drawled Louisiana vocals, she pulls the thing together in a way that avoids being maudlin. Utterly compelling. **JP**

THE HENRY GIRLS

FAR BEYOND THE STARS ★★★★★

WWW.THEHENRYGIRLS.COM

The Henry Girls are three sisters from Donegal, and like many Irish musicians have a mid Atlantic approach to their music, typified by the opening song 'Oh Why', a headlong drum driven opus with careening banjo and spiky mandolin runs. 'Down By The River' shows off the girls glorious bewitching harmonies, before the delicate instrumental shading that introduces 'More Love, More Silence', Karen McLaughlin's ethereal fiddle conjuring visions of misty mountains and swelling seas. The girl's last album was very special, but they've now come up with a gem. **JP**

PRINZ GRIZZLEY

COME ON IN ★★★★★

WWW.PRINZGRIZZLEY.COM

If having a weird name is an open sesame to the Jools Holland show, then this guy's got a good head start. But despite outward appearances, this is not that weird. Chris Comper is an Austrian singer-songwriter with an Americana obsession, and fronting a band featuring Aaron Goldstein's whining pedal steel, makes a pretty decent fist of songs like the loping 'Give Me One More Reason'. You can almost see the tumbleweeds. It takes a while for the album to get out of second gear, but by the time Grizzley notches up the heat on the hillbilly romp of 'Mountain's Milk', his credentials are no longer in doubt. **JP**

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CHRIS EATON FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

'ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY'

Christmas is nearly over but there's still time for some bottleneck festive cheer

I thought it'd be fun to learn a Christmas tune using bottleneck slide. But which song, carol or melody to choose? Then I remembered this lovely version of 'Once In Royal David's City' arranged for solo guitar by the English slide player Bryn Haworth.

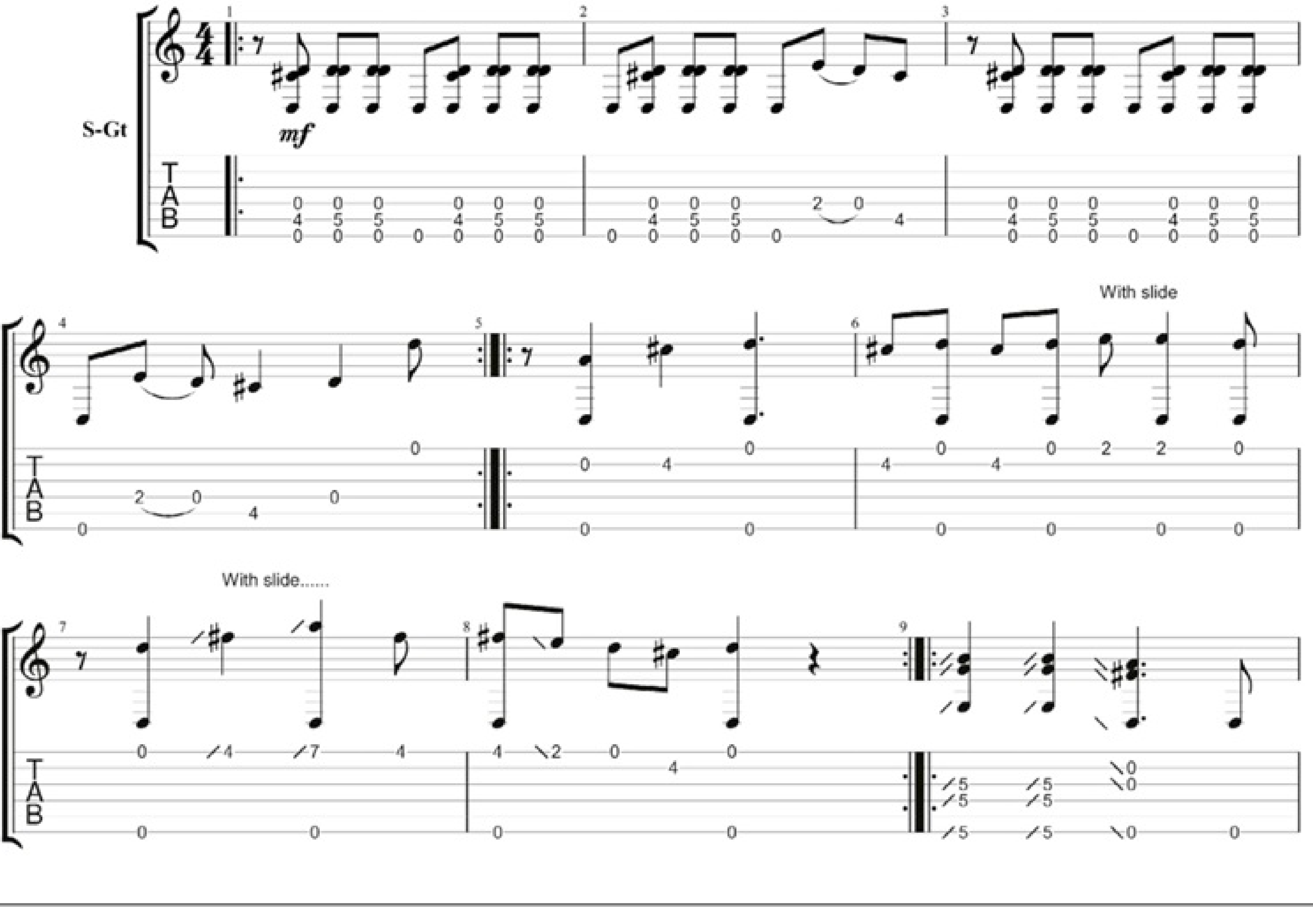
'Once In Royal David's City' is, of course, one of our most popular Christmas carols and was originally written as a poem by Cecil Frances Alexander. In 1849 the English organist Henry John Gauntlett set it to music. Various contemporary artists have recorded it, including Mary Chapin Carpenter, The Chieftains, Jethro Tull and Sinéad O'Connor.

My written music this month is not a note for note transcription of Bryn's recording, but rather a compilation of themes and ideas from his arrangement, which can be found on his *One Way Ticket* album and also on his YouTube channel. It's well worth listening to, as his performance builds wonderfully and features many beautiful harmonies and licks not transcribed here. He recorded it on a Beltona resonator guitar in open Eb tuning, however I've written it half a tone lower in open D (DADF#AD). As usual I'll post a video demo on my Instagram page. The piece combines fingerstyle solo guitar, bottleneck slide and fretting behind the slide (as per my previous two columns). So, it's a great way to practice all those playing styles. Fretting behind the slide is certainly something that requires constant maintenance, in my experience.

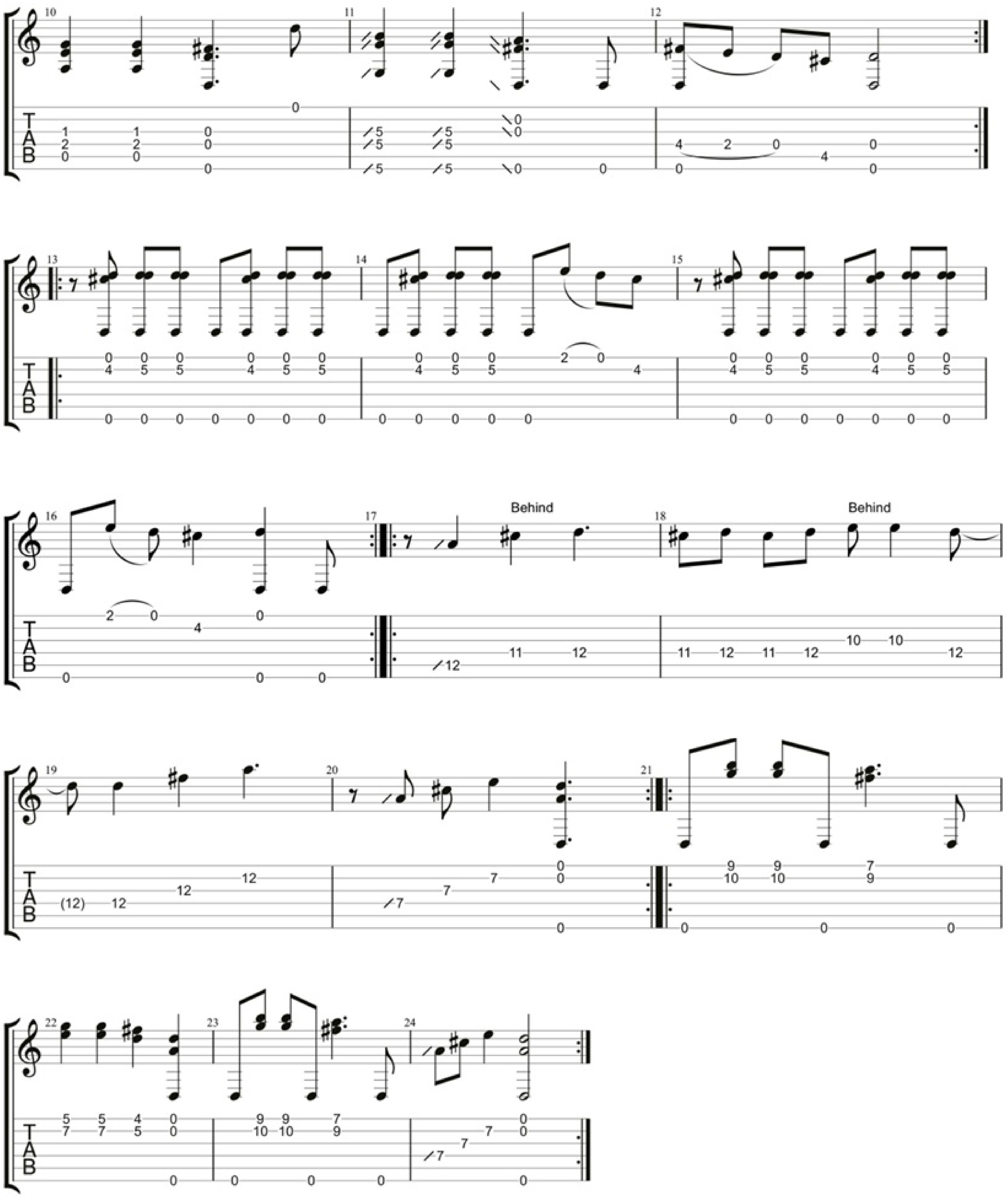
Bars 1-4 is the intro riff, which returns later but an octave higher. The slide is not used until beat 3 of bar 6. The fretting behind the slide takes place in bars 17/18 and the double stops at the end of the piece are fretted normally without use of the slide. All sections are played twice, so pay attention to the repeat dots. ■

Bryn Haworth
Arguably the UK's best bottleneck guitarist, Bryn has a wonderful touch and very melodic phrasing. He wears a short slide which stops at the knuckle of his third finger. An experienced session player, Bryn's recorded for Chris de Burgh, Joan Armatrading, Cliff Richards and Gerry Rafferty (including sessions at JJ Cale's Crazy Mama's studio in Nashville).

'ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY'



"The piece combines fingerstyle solo guitar, bottleneck slide and fretting behind the slide"



THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

FULL TAB ONLINE

'FULL CIRCLE'

Thomas borrows from Newton Faulkner's palette for this evocative piece

'Full Circle' was inspired by the glorious spring in a canyon next to my home after a wildfire rushed through and left us with a moonscape for months. The tuning was stolen from Newton Faulkner (it's wonderful if you can nick stuff back from friends who nick from you!) and is quite out of character. This song took me only about a day or two to really write. There's not really much to it, if you give the tune the space it needs and observe spaces and rhythm.

It's an easy one to rush, so make sure you stay in a solid groove all the way through.

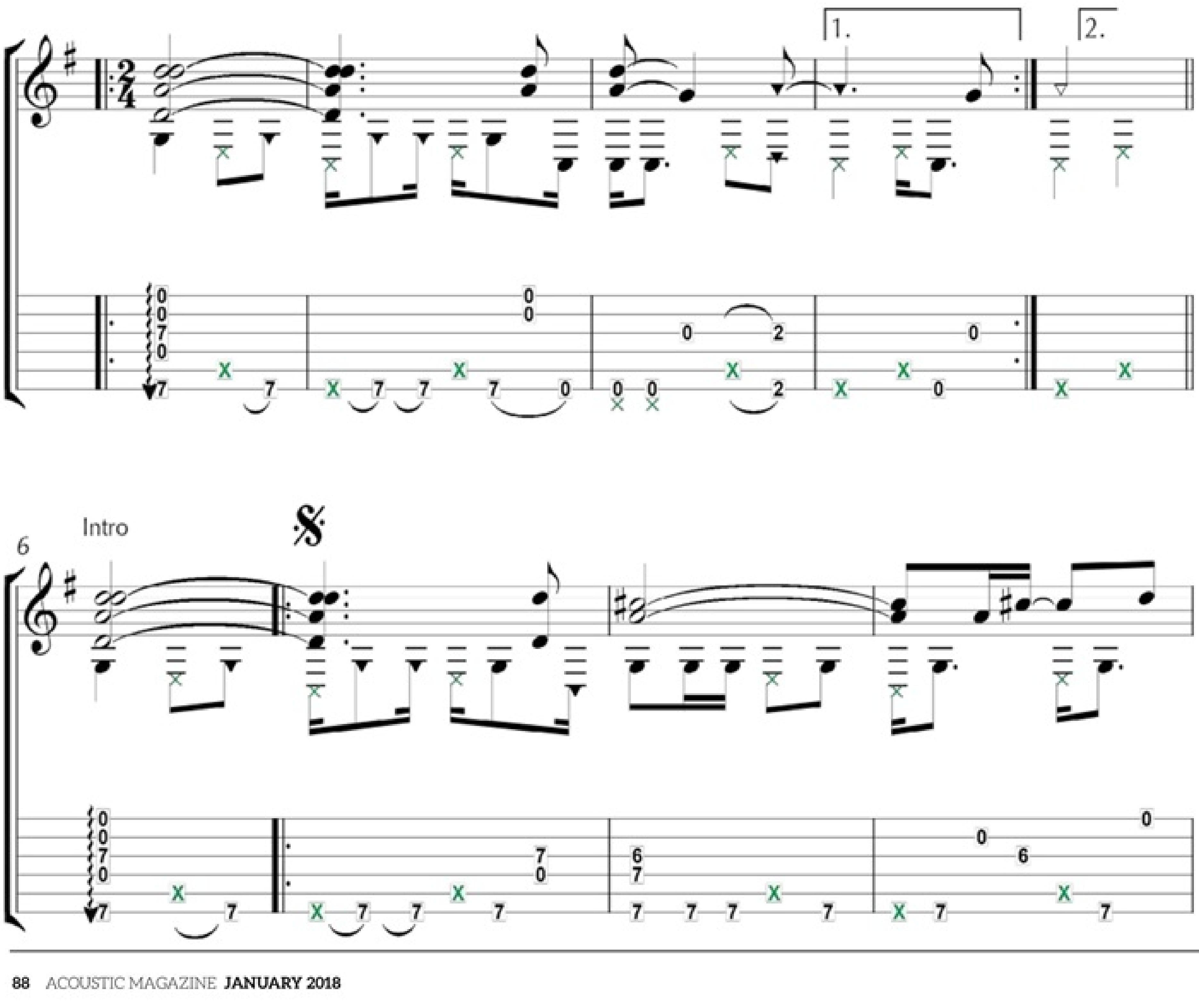
In bars 14, 18, 22, 30 51, I only notated the primarily important note as a slapped harmonic here. You'll end up getting a few others to ring out with this slap but this should be the loudest. Don't try to 'clean' this up – the other ones do sound good! The initial chord in bar 16 is strummed with your right-hand index finger. Hold it until the end of the bar, where you position your right hand index finger over the node points on the twelfth frets and pull off the shape you've been holding with your left hand this entire bar.

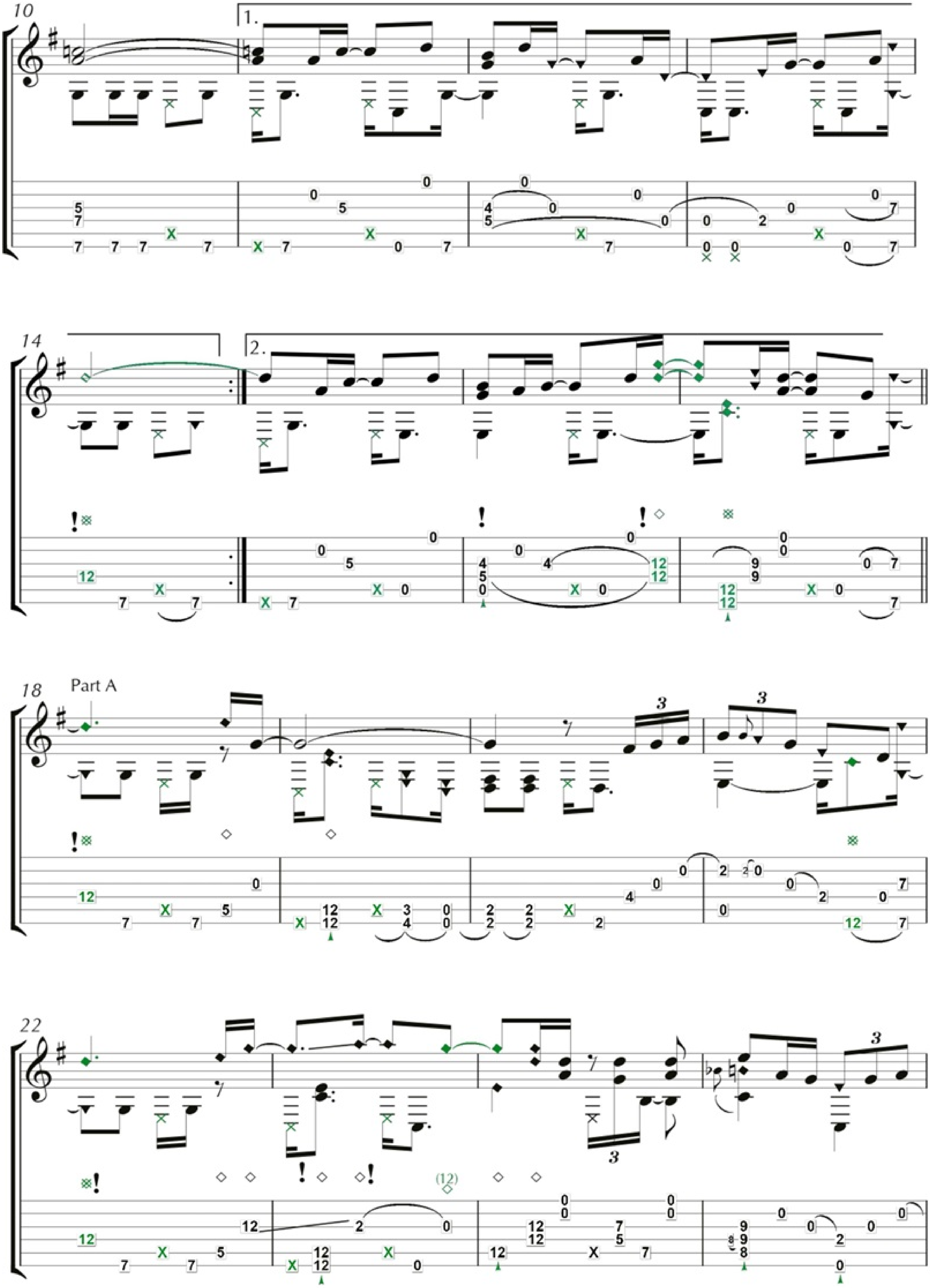
You're looking at the first of many slide-harmonics in this tune in bar 23. At the end of bar 22, you play a harmonic, which rings over to the next bar. This harmonic can be slid up with your left hand index finger with pressure from fret zero (ie the nut) up to the second fret. In the same bar, and again in measure 31, you find a 'pull-off harmonic' which is created by a left-hand pull-off while simultaneously holding the right-hand index finger over the node point on the twelfth fret. The slide harmonic in bar 38 and throughout part B is similar as the one in bar 23 – you take what's remaining of the harmonic from the previous bar and slide that up two frets. This is again followed by a pulled-off harmonic.

The entire second half of Part B is the same as the first half, with the exception of these harmonics – the high harmonic should ring through the following bars, while the lower one is used for the following slides and pull-offs. If you're good at reading music, you'll find that the slide in this bar isn't notated correctly, the reason for this being that if I did notate it right, it would start looking really confusing. The slide up happens right after the picked first string.

I'd suggest forgetting the slide for now – it will happen naturally between changing the chords. ■

'FULL CIRCLE'

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DANIEL HO GRAMMY WINNING UKELELE AND SLACK KEY GUITAR PLAYER

FULL TAB ONLINE

'8 BY 8'

This month Daniel has put together a piece to test your technique and rhythm

This comprehensive and creative etude was written to improve your technique and rhythm on any musical instrument. It is based on an eight-note theme, of your choosing, which is then modified through a fixed set of permutations designed to develop your ability to syncopate and subdivide with greater musicality and accuracy.

I decided on an eight-note theme as the foundation of this etude because there are eight notes in a scale. For example, you could simply use an ascending C major scale from the note C to the C an octave above as a theme. But it might be more interesting to come up with an original eight-note melody using notes in the C scale. This is a creative exercise, so instead of playing up and down scales or fixed patterns (like many of us piano students did with our Hanon exercises), you can choose any eight notes as your theme. They can be different everyday to open your mind to melodic possibilities as well as to prevent motor memory from inhibiting your imagination. The possibilities are infinite!

EXAMPLE 1

For this lesson, let's use a short eight-note theme. To truly benefit from this, use a metronome. Many of the subdivisions are intricate and an absolute time reference is necessary. '8 by 8' works best with your metronome set to around 80 BPM. It's also important to tap your foot on the quarter note downbeats to develop your internal clock. The goal is to keep a steady groove without a metronome.

EXAMPLE 2 – MAIN EXERCISE

'8 by 8' has two sections: the first section, measures 1 to 35, develops your ability to feel and play advanced syncopations, using "hemiola-like" groupings of notes that accent every part of the 16th note rhythm. The second section, measures 36 to 91 trains your internal clock while developing your ability to transition between different subdivisions of a quarter note.

Notice that the theme and all its permutations are each played eight times. This magical number of repetitions somehow returns the phrase back to the downbeat, even when the 16th notes are grouped in phrases of seven, six, five, four, three, and two. The eight-note theme is stated in measure one and played eight times. A gentle accent, designated by a horizontal line by the note head, marks the start of each theme statement.

In bar nine, the last note of the theme is omitted, shortening the duration of the phrase to a total of seven 16th notes. Once again, a soft accent marks the beginning of each phrase, but this time the start of each phrase cycles through a different part of the beat. If you study measures 9 – 15, you'll see each phrase starts one 16th note earlier than the previous phrase.

Eight repetitions of this seven-note phrase bring us to the downbeat of bar 16. Here, the last note of the seven-note phrase is eliminated to create a six-note phrase. All the same principles apply. In measure 22, the last note of the six-note phrase is removed to create a five-note phrase. Notice how the accents cycle through different parts of the beat. These moving accents help you to feel and play syncopations more accurately.

Take a breather at measure 26, because the four-note phrase falls evenly on 16th notes. Measure 31 is the start of the three-note phrase, and bar 34 is the beginning of the two-note phrase. It's remarkable that the eight-note phrase (bars 1 – 8) is eight bars long, the seven-note phrase (bars 9 – 15) is seven bars long, the six-note phrase (bars 16 – 21) is six, the five-note phrase (22 – 26) is five, the four-note phrase (bars 27 – 30) is four, the three-note phrase (31 – 33) is three, and the two-note phrase (bars 34 – 35) is two!

Section 2 begins at measure 36 with the same two-note phrase in measures 34 – 35. But this time, it is played as quarter notes instead of 16th notes. This compositional technique is known as augmentation, which means the durations of each note are stretched or augmented. From here, we add a note every eight bars to build back up to the original eight-note theme. Similar to the first section, each phrase is played eight times. The difference is that each phrase will start on the downbeat of a bar, so the rhythmic values of each phrase will shorten as we add notes.

The note E is added in measure 44 to make it a three-note phrase. The rhythm is increased to quarter note triplets to accommodate these three notes in one bar of 2/4. It's important to continue tapping your foot on the quarter note downbeats.

Measure 52 adds the note F to make it a four-note phrase. Eighth notes are used to fit the phrase

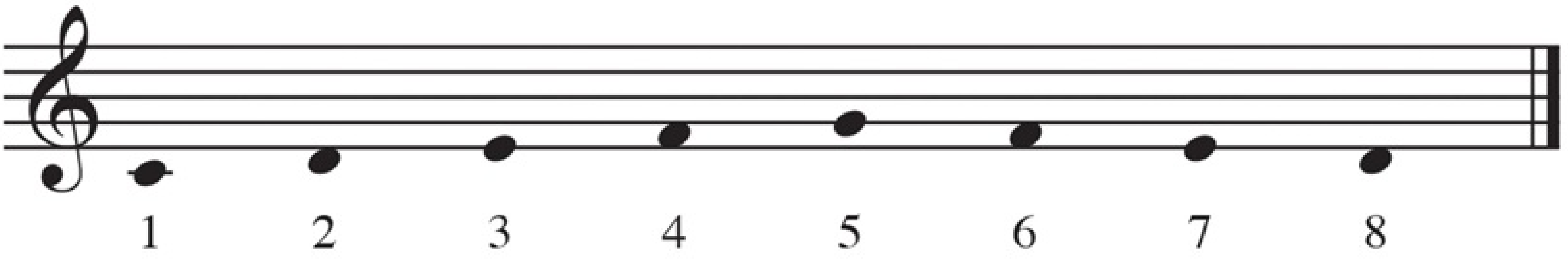
> **"Instead of playing up-and-down scales you can choose any 8 notes as your theme"**

evenly in one bar. Bar 60 is where it gets a little challenging. By adding the note G, we now need to play five notes evenly in one bar of 2/4. It's essential to continue tapping your foot on quarter notes. Hint: the second beat of each bar falls halfway between the E and F melody notes of the phrase. Measure 68 becomes a six-note phrase when the note F is added. Triplets comfortably allow six notes to be played in each bar. Measures 76 – 83 might be the most challenging section. The note E is added to increase the phrase to seven notes. Evenly spacing them in a 2/4 bar is not instinctive, and beat two of each bar (where you tap your foot) is pretty hard to find while playing a seven-note phrase. Hint: It falls halfway between the 4th note, F, and the 5th note, G, of each phrase.

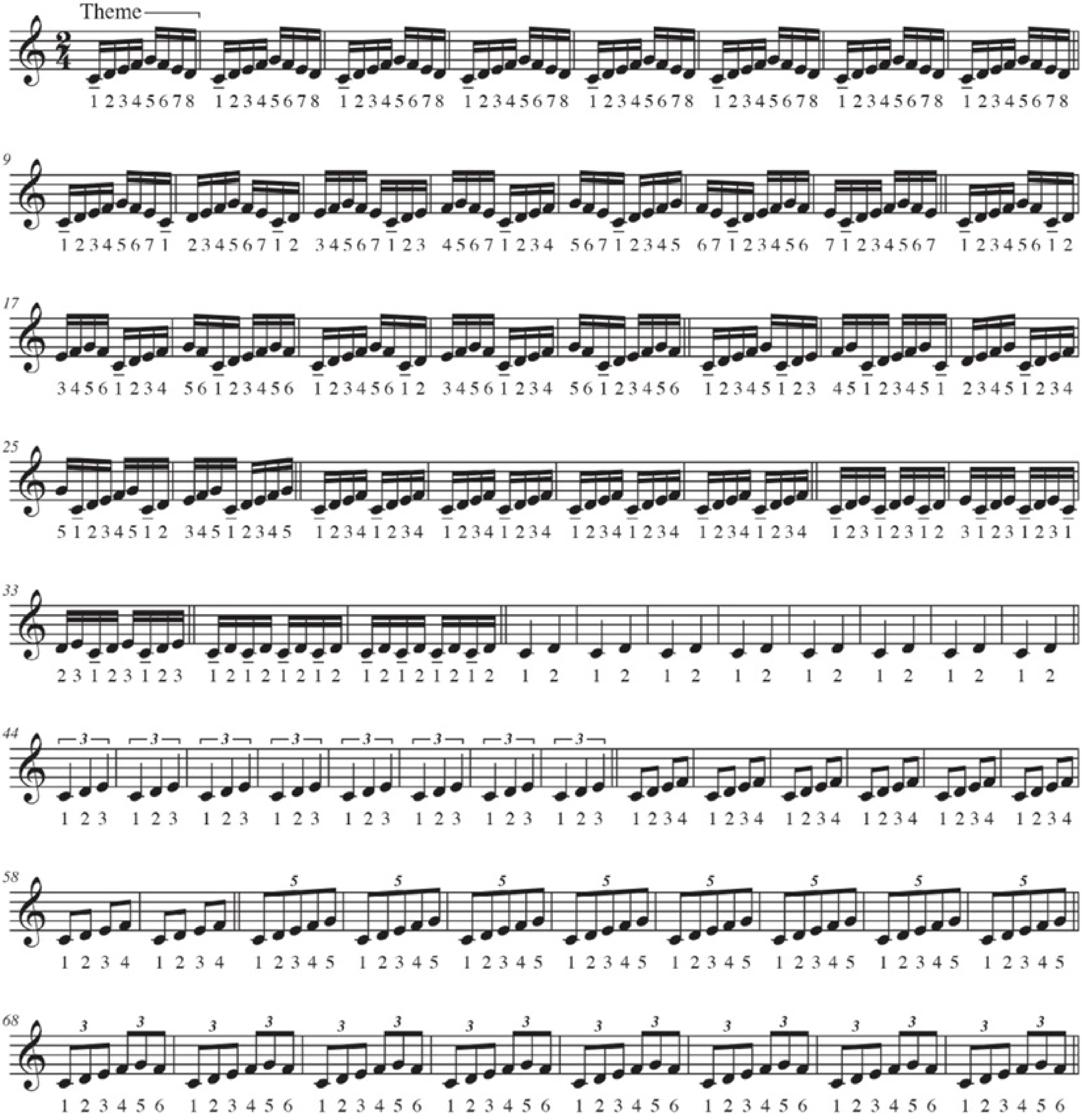
Finally, we are home free as bars 84 –91 are the same as the first eight bars of the piece!

'8 by 8' was created to be easy to remember: an eight-note theme played eight times each at 80 beats per minute. There are many ways to continue challenging yourself as you become comfortable with this etude. Of course, you can write new themes, but you can also use it to learn different scales (natural minor, melodic minor, harmonic minor, diminished, whole tone, pentatonic), introduce dynamics, and increase the tempo. Most importantly, you can be creative while you refine your technique, internal clock, and rhythmic vocabulary! ■

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

'I SAW THREE SHIPS'

FULL TAB ONLINE

The popular Christmas carol gets the Carroll acoustic treatment

I Saw Three Ships has been sung in England for more than 400 years and there are countless arrangements of it for the guitar. I first heard an instrumental version by the great John Renbourn, who often performed his unique arrangement as the central tune in a medley flanked by Bunyan's *Hymn and English Dance*. The melody printed here is the oldest version I could find.

So, why create yet another arrangement of this? Well, as this is a 'techniques' column I've written a set of variations under the umbrella of a complete arrangement. Firstly, if you're not already familiar, may I introduce you to the world of DGDGBD tuning? This eight-bar melody works beautifully in this tuning and the first variation doesn't require any overly energetic finger work in the fretting hand. The melody repeats from bars 9-16 and includes a contrasting minor sixth harmony within bars 10 and 14.

I've written bars 17-24 to serve as a bridge before the traditional melody is heard an octave higher from bar 25. Suggested fret-hand fingerings are marked in the standard staff notation and special attention should be given to the rhythm when shifting position on the neck. Practice slowly and record yourself so you can listen to what's going on without having to actually play it. Very useful advice in my book! Bars 33 to 40 contain a variation exclusive to harmonics. Well, almost… notice the single Cs in bars 34 and 38, which are plucked 'naturally'. The harmonics require a light touch with the fretting fingers and a crisp, clear sound is achieved by plucking nearer to the bridge.

> **"This eight-bar melody works beautifully in DGDGBD tuning"**

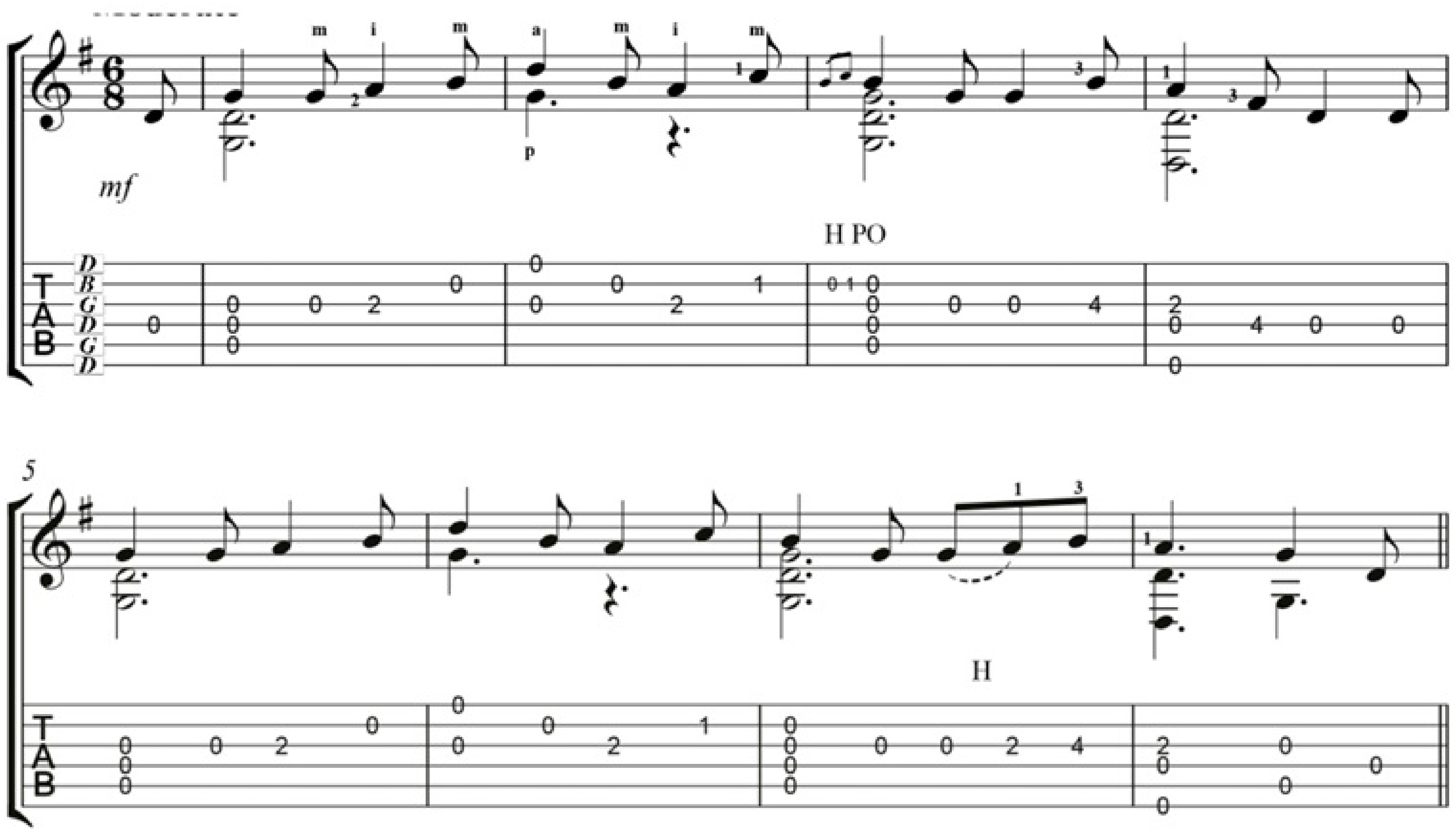
At this stage you will discover that this 'techniques column' arrangement becomes more challenging! At bar 41 there is another self-composed 'bridge', which is a variation on the previous one and from bar 49 we hear the traditional melody again – this time with contrasting and some quicker harmonic changes underneath.

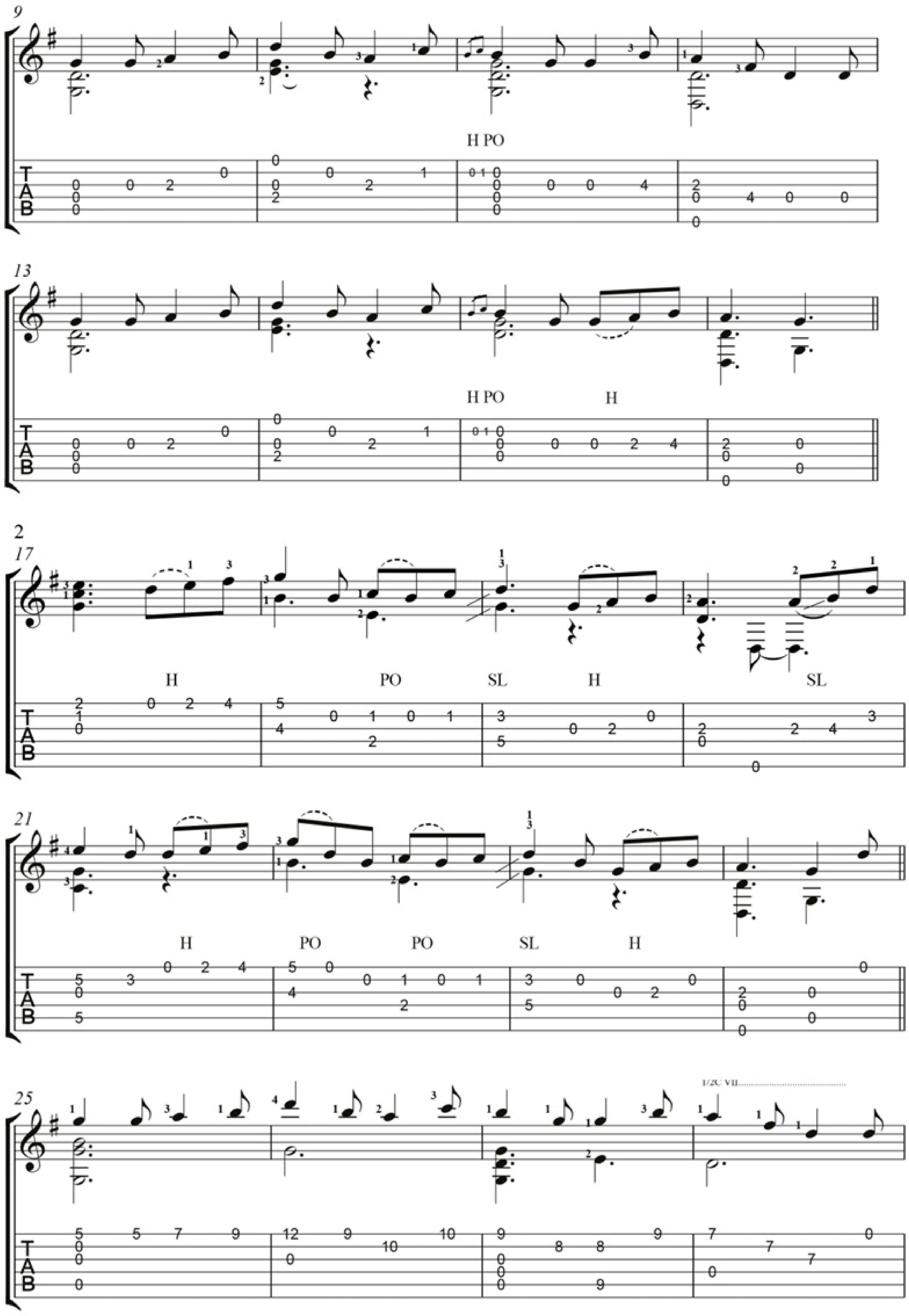
The final version begins with the addition of an upper voice and there are some shifts in octave of the traditional melody before concluding with a rallentando and harmonics at the 12th fret.

I hope you'd like to hear this arrangement? I have recorded two versions for you: one very slow and another up to speed and you can listen to them over at www.clivecarroll.co.uk/acoustic-magazine.html

Enjoy learning this classic over the holiday season and I look forward to bringing you more techniques in 2018! ■

'I SAW THREE SHIPS'

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LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

'LAY DOWN YOUR WEARY TUNE'

Think bluegrass has to be fast-paced? Hunt takes the tempo down a notch with some help from a Dylan classic

Maybe it's my age, but these days I seem to get far more satisfaction and enjoyment from playing slow, lyrical music on the banjo than I do from breaking a sweat, thrashing out 100mph bluegrass standards. As I sit writing these words I can almost hear the stifled sniggering. Restrain your disbelief for a moment and I'll do my best to convince you that the banjo is more than capable of delivering gentle, sensitive and melodious music.

Before we get stuck into the specifics of The Bob Dylan classic, 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', we should first take a look at the sonic properties of the instrument itself. The sound of the banjo is generally known for two things – it's quite loud and has very little sustain – two characteristics that don't naturally lend themselves to playing gentle, slow and emotive music. I'm now going to state the obvious but bare with me, it's something that seems to pass many banjo players by. If you play a banjo gently it'll get quieter, furthermore, the sound will become softer and less brash. Crucially, because this initial 'plucked' note is now quieter, the disparity between the transient of the note and the subsequent decay is greatly reduced. All of a sudden you begin to hear the rich sustain of your banjo that you never knew existed.

Unfortunately, all this newfound sonic opulence comes at a price: 'Pick noise' or the unwanted mechanical sound generated by your picking hand, suddenly becomes a more significant factor within your overall sound. If we borrow a sound engineering term, 'signal to noise ratio', it's easy to see the issue here. The pick noise you're creating whilst playing gently isn't really any quieter than when you were hammering the living daylights out of your banjo. However, with our greatly reduced signal (or quieter note), the noise has immediately become more apparent. Sadly there aren't any silver bullets here, all you can do is put in the time to clean up your act. Study both your left and right hands and track down where these unwanted noises are coming from. You'll then have to do whatever it takes to eliminate them. While this can be a laborious and time consuming process, the good news is that all this detailing will without doubt have a positive effect on the sound you produce in general, at all speeds and volumes.

"This simple melody leaves us little to hide behind"

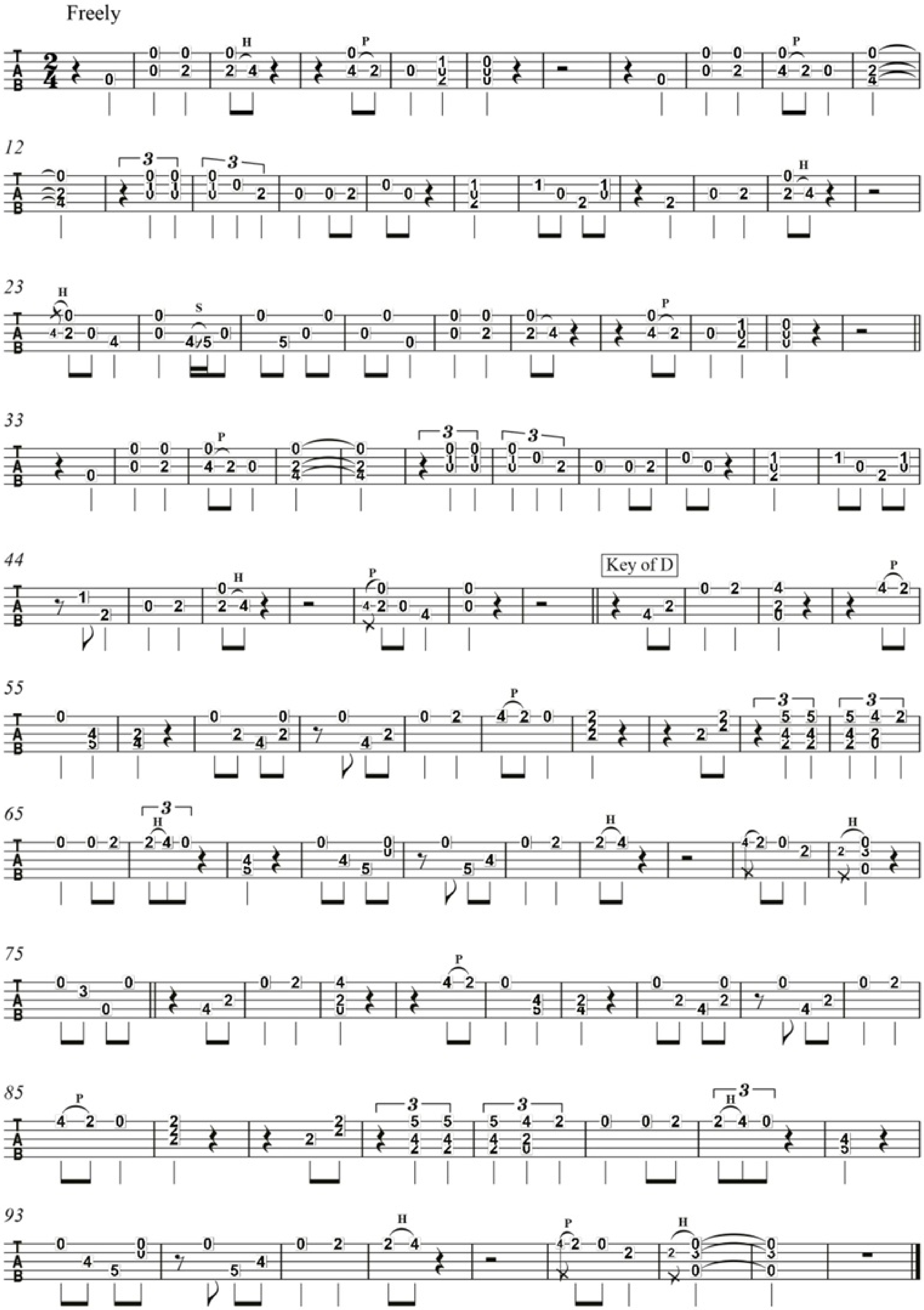
'Lay Down your Weary Tune' is one of my all-time favourite Bob Dylan songs. It was originally recorded for his third studio album, *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, but for some inexplicable reason, failed to make the cut. The original recording didn't end up seeing the light of day until the mid '80s when his 'best of' collection *Biograph* was released. For this month's column I've worked up a slow, almost pianistic instrumental rendering of the song. As lovely as it is, there's actually not all that much of it. For this reason I've arranged it across two keys (G then D), placing a modulation in the middle at bar 51.

Unlike most of the music I've covered in this column, this simple hymn-like melody leaves us very little in terms of speed, smoke and mirrors to hide behind. In situations like these we need to do everything in our power to draw the cleanest and fullest tone the banjo can give us. Having successfully eliminated all the unwanted pick noise, we now need to shift our attention towards achieving the highest quality note possible. The position of your picks on your fingers, the angle of your banjo in your lap, and the distance from the bridge you're picking the strings are all great places to start looking.

Beyond working on tone, there are one or two other strategies we can employ to bolster the sound and make things more interesting. Pinching the melody notes alongside one or more extra open strings really adds to the hymn-like quality of the melody. With the standard G tuning that we're using there are plenty of useful open stringed opportunities presented for both keys. In terms of phrasing, this is very much a free, solo 'rubato' arrangement. To get the rhythmic feel and dynamics just right, approach it more like a solo pianist than a five-string banjo player. ■

This banjo-friendly tune didn't see the light until 1985's *Biograph*

'LAY DOWN YOUR WEARY TUNE'



CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

SEEING SOUNDS PART 3

The last in Chris's series exploring visual inspiration for making music

As always, even if you have not been following the column recently, you can still jump right in. The seeing sound series is all about composing and playing to visuals. In a world of social media the mix of film, imagery and music is becoming increasingly commonplace. The sync licensing industry too (writing for adverts, film etc) is also becoming a staple of a musician's working life; so taking time to think visually about music is a great thing to do.

In the past two instalments we've been looking at two contrasting images. This time I've prepared a single and slightly longer exercise or 'mini-piece' for you to get stuck into. This month's image is 'A Desert Sunrise'. An image we've all seen in countless movies, I'm not focusing on a specific desert or country, just the generic idea of a dusty and spacious desert vista, with a powerful sun rising slowly. The piece, as always, is kept relatively simple to make reading the music accessible and giving you scope to make it your own.

So, where did I start? Firstly I began by putting those abstract ideas or feelings that I get from this image into musical ideas. Some of those abstract feelings that physically make up the image are just waiting to be used as musically. In the case of the desert, it's sparse and spacious; so guess what? The piece is going to be spacious. Secondly the idea of a sun rise is a developing thing, something that grows or progresses, so that's our second musical idea sorted for us.

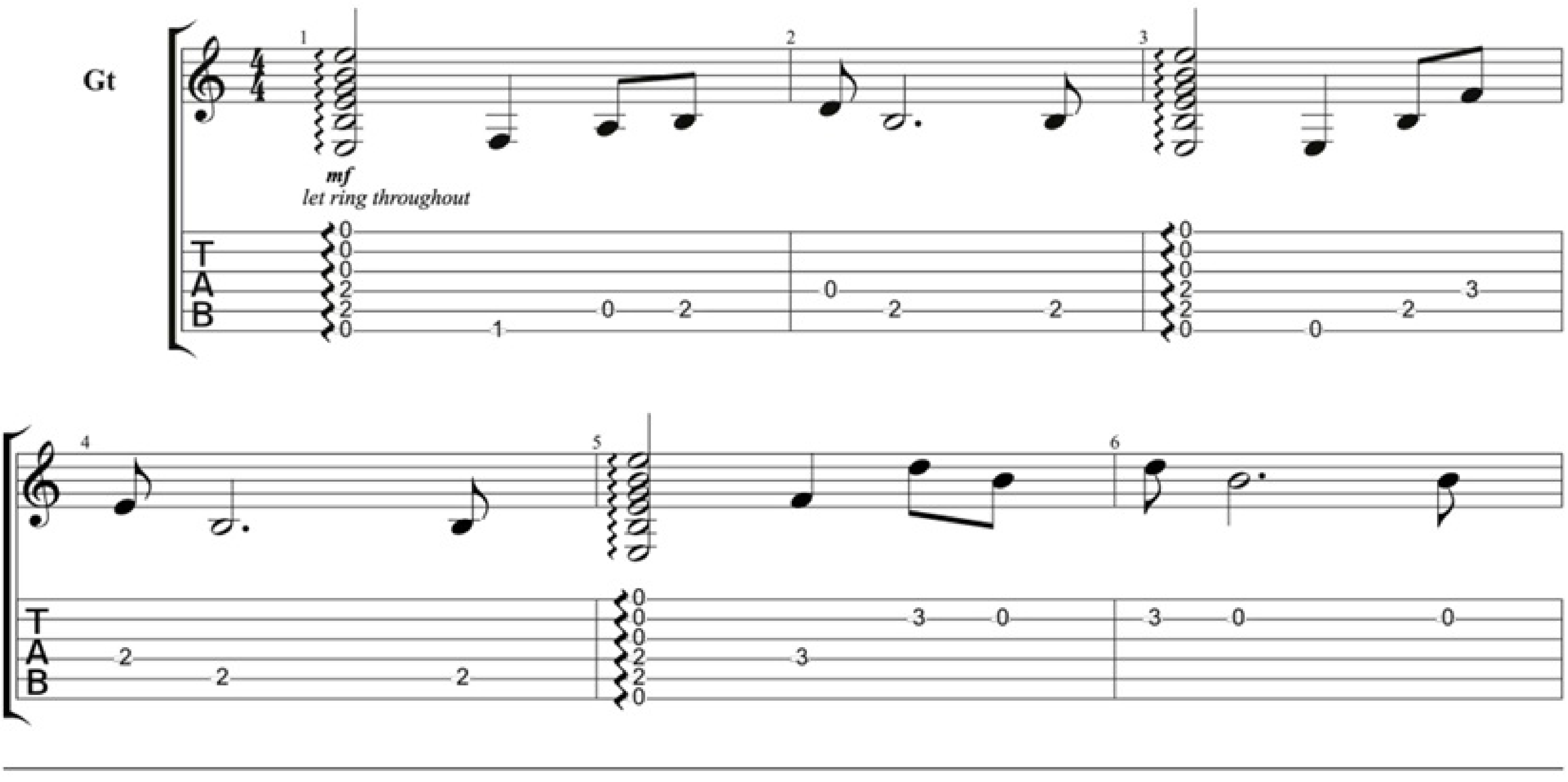
> **"The desert holds a genre of music all unto itself"**

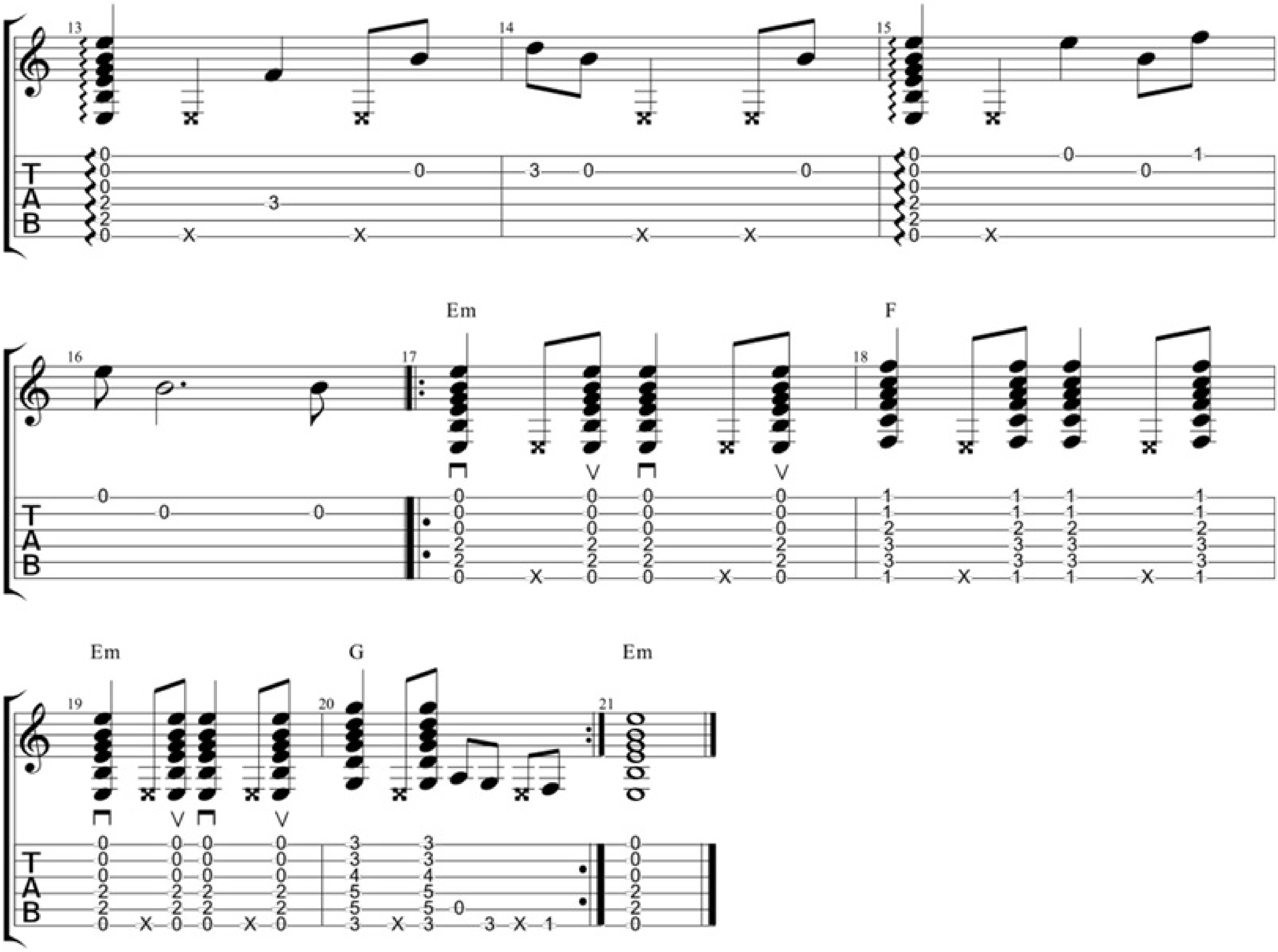
With these two basic principles in mind we have a good foundation and shape for a composition, something spacious and something steadily progressive. Beyond the literal ideas, I needed to create the atmosphere of the place or image. Not so easy or literal. The feeling I get from a desert images is one associated with films. Cowboy films or exotic adventures. The desert is somewhere that holds a genre of music all unto itself.

When I see this image, I can hear sounds of soundtracks splattering of flamenco or twangy and spiky 'pulp fiction style' guitar sounds. With this in mind I specifically chose to write the piece in the E Phrygian. For those who are nervous of theory, the simplest way to explain it is a C major scale but using the E as a root note, the end result is something more mystical and almost flamenco in sound. To create that 'twanging' texture I mentioned I have opened each bar with a raked E minor chord. Play this close to the bridge for maximum twang. The piece starts with a relatively simple and sparse melody, but a string slap is steadily introduced to represent the progression of the rising sun. The rhythm 'plods' along in a way that is reminiscent of a western movie. The final few bars are a simplistic yet steady chord progression with a short riff at the end.

I hope you enjoy playing it, and I hope this series has offered some inspiration for you to get working with. Enjoy... ■

SEEING SOUNDS PART 3 - THE DESERT

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© Ken Bosma

On this month in 1992, Eric Clapton went acoustic to perform a timeless set which would become one of his most successful albums

Eric Clapton is best known for driving rock and blues, lightning-fast guitar solos, and being one of the most influential electric guitarists of all time. But in 1992, MTV convinced Clapton to lay aside his signature Fender Stratocaster in favour of some acoustic guitars for the *Unplugged* sessions.

Recorded in front of a 300-strong audience at Bray Film Studios, in Windsor, on January 16, 1992, Clapton's performance is genius from start to finish. When *MTV Unplugged with Eric Clapton* debuted on television in March, it became the series' highest rated show. It proved to be so popular, a 'Part 2' featuring songs not in the original broadcast was aired in June.

The album, released on August 25, 1992, remains the most successful and best-selling live album ever. It received nine nominations at the 35th Annual Grammy Awards in 1993, winning in six categories. *Unplugged* is also one of Clapton's most successful albums, having sold more than 26 million copies.

When Clapton took the stage it was a particularly emotional time for the musician. Still reeling from the death of his four-year-old son Conor months earlier from a bizarre incident where he fell out of the window of his 53rd floor apartment building, Clapton had penned the track 'Tears in Heaven' for the soundtrack to the film 'Rush' in honour of his son. The soundtrack had just been released just prior to the taping. To compound matters, in August 1990, his manager, two of his roadies and his friend and fellow musician Stevie Ray Vaughan were killed in a helicopter accident.

On the night, Clapton sat centre stage alongside new band recruit Andy Fairweather Low (rhythm guitar and mandolin) to his right and Nathan East (bass) to his left. Behind them were Steve Ferrone (drums), Ray Cooper (percussion), Chuck Leavell (piano) and Katie Kissoon and Tessa Niles (backing vocalists). It was a typical television shoot with a lot of stopping and starting over the course of two hours. Some songs had to be redone due to technical concerns.

"I was lucky enough to be invited to Bray Studios to watch the filming," biographer Marc Roberty remembers. "Several of the songs that Eric had written about the tragic loss of his son the previous year were played in public for the first time that day. 'Tears In Heaven' was a particularly poignant moment for him during the performance.

"The acoustic format of the show also allowed him to rearrange his well-known hits – 'Layla' in particular fooled everyone on the night. A personal highlight was the unplanned – and unrehearsed – performance of 'Rollin' And Tumblin'. Played during some downtime in between takes, it caught the producer off guard and the record button was hit a minute or so into the song. It was not on the set list and was never meant to be played."

Despite the spectacular reception that *Unplugged* had received, Clapton was surprisingly dismissive of the session. "When Warner Brothers suggested it should be released as a CD, Eric was very much against the idea," Roberty continues. "Had the show been recorded with that idea in mind, he has admitted that he would have done things differently."

Clapton's raw, heartfelt performance immediately struck a cord with listeners, however. The album renewed the public's interest in the musician, and helped to pave the way for Clapton's return to an all-blues format with *From The Cradle* (1994), the international hit 'Change the World' (1996), as well as the staple acoustic renditions of songs featured on his later tours. ■

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